A Prodigal's Progress.

Frank Barrett

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A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS.

BY

FRANK BARRETT,

AUTHOR OF

"LIEUTENANT BARNABAS," "FOLLY MORRISON," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH BLASE YIELDS TO MR. TICKEL'S PERSUASIONS.

Blase wrote in a letter to his grandfather under date Dec. 20th:

"—— and here are six weeks gone, and not a word from the agent concerning my commission. Indeed, sir, I fear that I might wait as many years and be no nearer my colours for any advancement I am likely to get in that quarter; for I am given to understand that his Grace the Duke of York's lady has the traffick entirely in her hands, having by means of under-

selling the agents virtually stopped the authorized way of communicating with the Commander-in-Chief. To place myself on a footing with other candidates I have obtained an introduction to Lord Brompton, whose father, the Marquis of Cranbury, has the honour of being intimately acquainted with the Duke's favourite, and through his good offices I hope soon to be relieved from my present anxieties."

He did not say how feeble this hope was. He had never put great faith in Lord Brompton's assertions of influence, and his belief grew less every day under the persistent attacks of the Rev. Mr. Tickel.

The parson hated soldiering as he hated fasting, or travelling, or anything else opposed to the tranquil enjoyment of life and its good things, and he conscientiously believed that it was his duty as a wise and affectionate friend to prevent Blase from adopting a profession which he himself so heartily detested.

"My boy," said Mr. Tickel, in a tone of paternal tenderness, "it will not do to go on in this manner any longer. You are throwing away money upon worthless friends when you need every penny for yourself. 'Tis like clapping on a dozen leeches when you are fainting from loss of blood. What did last night's junketing cost you?—Bill Shakespeare and Ben Jonson in fifteen volumes and a French binding. And to-morrow another row of books must go to feast my Lord Brompton and his friends; and so on, until there's nothing on the shelves but a ghastly puppet show of Chiny images, and then Lord help us to a ten pound note. And what do you get for your money? Nothing. What had you last night in exchange for a decent shelf of books but the satisfaction of losing all your ready money and giving an acknowledgment for fifteen guineas to a man you never saw before in

all your life. And here we are this morning with the doldrums again."

"There never was such cursed luck as mine. No matter what I touch, 'tis alike in the result."

"This playing a game of ecarté one night, and a hand of ombre the next, can do you no good. The only success possible is by playing steadily at one table against gamesters whose strength you know."

"If you want me to go back to White's you may argue as you like without avail. I swore I would keep from the house, and I'll keep my word."

"Heaven forbid I should counsel you to break it. All I protest against is your playing with any men Lord Brompton chooses to regale at your expense."

"I must keep in with him. You know how he can serve me."

"A short acquaintance is sufficient to show that; and I doubt not but he will

continue to serve you in the same fashion till you are fleeced to the skin. What is he?—The seventh son of a marquis who keeps his head above water by hanging on to the tail of the Duke of York's hussy. I warrant the father and son never exchange two civil words in the course of a year, yet you expect him to persuade his father to put himself out of the way on behalf of a young gentleman he has never clapped eyes upon. Why, this is an unconscionable tax to put upon the memory of a man with so many affairs to look after. He would require a memorandum of your want writ on the back of a bill for a hundred guineas to think of it at all. So much for the Marquis of Cranbury; as for Lord Brompton, do you think he values your hospitality so little that he will put himself out of the way to get you sent off to a garrison? Pish! Blase, where's your common sense? 'Twould be time better

spent to make the acquaintance of the courtezan's woman, and give her a guinea to represent you to her mistress as a cousin who would be a soldier, you might then stand a chance of getting your colours."

There was truth in what the parson said, and there was no getting rid of the unpleasant facts. They were a sort of burrs that the parson never tired of pelting at him, and they had their effect. Blase grew weary of being a butt. He began to suspect not only that he was being duped, but that he was being ridiculed by those who duped him. That made him lose his temper; he ceased to invite Lord Brompton to his house, and peremptorily bade the parson say no more upon the subject of his commission.

Mr. Tickel was too wise to disobey this command. He perceived that it wanted but a little more discomfort to make the route which Blase at present pursued so

detestable to him that he would diverge from it by the first opening that was presented. So he left things to take their own unpleasant course.

Adversity had already made Blase acquainted with a money-lender — one Mr. Phillips, an unctuous, over-dressed gentleman, who dealt in wines and many other things of uncertain value. He disliked and mistrusted the man, but he knew that sooner or later he must accept the assistance which had been so freely offered by him. And now it was impossible to put off the evil day any longer.

During the past two months he had run into debt with his tradespeople freely to keep up the appearance which was said to be indispensable to his obtaining a commission; and with quarter day came bills by the dozen. They must be paid. He would need money for an outfit when his commission came, and he should need more

money afterwards to live in the same style as other officers. Moreover, he felt heartily ashamed of the means he had permitted Tickel to employ in raising funds for immediate use. It was mean and disgraceful that his own servant should be sent out, his livery concealed under a roquelaure, to sell a trinket or a parcel of books; and however loyal and faithful Hutchins might be, Blase had no desire to accord him the equality which exists between accomplices. It was bad enough to have Tickel on the footing of an indispensable ally. So Blase wrote to Mr. Phillips, and that man of business came with the promptitude of the evil one to the summons of Faustus.

"Mr. Phillips, I wish you to lend me some money," said Blase.

"Delighted, my dear thir"—Mr. Phillips spoke with a peculiar lisp—"delighted if I can be of any thervice to you."

"How much can you let me have?"

"Well, thir," with a bland smile, "a man can't be buyer and theller too. How much do you want?" He cast his eyes round to see what security there might be in the shape of seizable property.

"Three or four thousand pounds."

"Three or four thouthand poundth!—whew!"

"Or less, if the sum is too much for you."

"I don't thay ith too heavy for me; but I thould like to know how you are going to pay it back, my dear thir."

"At my father's death I inherit an estate with a rent roll of ten to fifteen hundred pounds. When I succeed to this estate I will pay you the sum you lend, with reasonable interest."

Mr. Phillips put his hat under the chair, nursed his hands and twiddled his thumbs, repeating the words he had heard.

"Well, sir?" said Blase impatiently.

"How long do you think the old gen'leman'th going to live?"

"I cannot say."

Mr. Phillips whistled a little tune.

"Do you think the dear old gen'leman would lend you half the thum you want?"

"Certainly not. I have quarrelled with him."

Mr. Phillips continued his little tune.

"Thuppothing I get the money, could you let me have a bill payable at three months?"

"No. What use would it be to give such a bill? If my father lives I can't pay."

"Look here, my dear thir; put a cathe jutht for the thake of argument. Thuppothe when the bill cometh due your father thtill enjoyth the blethingth of health, and thuppothe for a joke—only for a joke—I pretend that if you don't pay I'll put you in prithon—only for a joke, you know—your father, to thave you from dithgrathe,

would pay the little bill, and you'd be ath free ath the little birdth in the hair—and there you are, don't you thee?"

"No; I refuse to sign any bill payable before my father's death."

Mr. Phillips whistled another thoughtful prelude, and then asked:

"How old may the dear gen'leman be now?"

"About fifty."

"Fifty! Blethed Abr'am! I might have to wait fifty year for my money!"

Blase shrugged his shoulders.

"He'th more likely to live fifty yearth than you are. I should have to bind you over to keep the peathe, and all manner of thingth."

"Well, if it can't be done—" said Blase, rising sharply, for he was sick of Phillips and his vulgarity, and began to see that the loan was impracticable.

"Not too fatht, my dear thir! not too

fatht! I don't thay the thing can't be done; but the rithk ith aw—ful! Give me your father'th name and addreth, and if I find he'th delicate, or likely to drop off thudden, or if there'th any hope at all, I'll help you."

"I do not wish my necessity to be known."

"God bleth me, no thir. Not a living creature thall hear a whithper of it from me."

With a secret reluctance Blase wrote his father's name and address; Mr. Phillips took it, and after a vain endeavour to make Blase buy a few dozen of old sack at an absurdly low price, left the room, promising to come again as soon as he had informed himself of Sir Gilbert's physical condition.

In a fortnight the money-lender re-appeared.

"I can't let you have four thouthand," were his first words; "but there'th two

thouthand for you at ten per thent when you like to take it, my dear thir."

"Two thousand will do," said Blase with a sigh of relief.

"I've theen Thir Gilbert—unbeknown of courth — and I like the lookth of him. He'th like a coach wheel, my dear thir—he may drop off at any moment, and jutht when it'th leatht expected."

"Can you let me have the money now?"

"To morrow morning, my dear thir—firtht thing. And I'm going to make it eathy for you to pay it back; fair'th fair, ain't it?"

"Well?"

"There ith a chanthe that you and me will both die before Thir Gilbert, ain't there?"

"Go on."

"And you don't want me to run a rithk of lothing my money, and you don't want to run a rithk of being put into prithon

for debt. Now look here, we can make up a note between uth that will become payable twelve month' from now. A month before that time you can take a little trip on the Continent and leave me to get my money betht way I can. If Thir Gilbert dieth beforehand tho much the better for both of uth; if he don't, I mutht trutht to hith generothity to pay your debt."

"No," said Blase, after a moment's thought; "I refuse to receive the loan on any conditions which make me liable during my father's life."

"Think it over, thir; think it over. Don't hurry. If you find that the termth I offer are fair and reathonable, and you'd like to acthept 'em, thend a line by your thervant, Mr. Hutchinth, and you thall have the money within four-and-twenty hourth."

The mention of Hutchins' name gave

Blase a suspicion of the motive with which Mr. Phillips had made his last proposal. He rang the bell when the money-lender was gone.

"Do you know the man who has just left the house?" he asked.

"He stopped me in the street about a week ago, sir, and would have me drink at his expense."

"And talk at mine, I expect?"

"No, if you please, sir; I know my duty to you. He would have had me tell him all about your father, but seeing that, I swore I knew no more about him than the man in the moon. I vowed I had never seen a relative of yours but Captain Davenant, your grandfather, and Miss Davenant, his daughter."

"What did you say of them?"

"I could only say what a fine old gentleman the captain was, and how he seemed to love you, sir?"

"That is enough," Blase said, with a short laugh.

"Hope I did no wrong, sir?"

"None. You may go."

Blase thanked heaven that he had not fallen into the trap. "To get me out of the way, and in my absence to present the bill for payment to my dear old grandfather —that was the Jew's intention. He may have heard of the old captain's simplicity from that brother rogue who sells him the coins. Heaven be praised, I suspected the rascal." Thus thought Blase, and resolved to have no further dealings with Mr. Phillips. But Mr. Phillips was not willing to lose so fair a chance of making money as he had suggested, and therefore did his utmost to make his assistance indispensable.

It was not difficult to discover Mr. Godwin's creditors. Mr. Phillips' plan was simple. He went to the most genteel

shops in the neighbourhood of Stanhope Street, where Blase lived, and made inquiries with respect to Mr. Godwin; communicating with much show of confidence to those shopkeepers who admitted their dealings with him just so much of his position as made them anxious to get their bills paid at once. Consequently, about the middle of January, Blase was pestered each morning with dunning letters couched in terms of entreaty, remonstrance, and menace.

Personal applications for payment were answered by Mr. Tickel, who resorted to every artifice which a fertile ingenuity could beget to make the creditors wait—taking a high hand with the weak, using persuasive argument with the strong, giving promises to the credulous, but money to none. He seemed to enjoy heartily the office which had fallen to him, and never tired of recounting in a

humorous fashion the shifts to which he had been put to get rid of the unfortunate claimants. To Blase all this was degrading and miserable in the extreme.

"This is insupportable!" he cried one morning, throwing down a letter on the breakfast table. "Here's a rascal of a tailor threatens to put me to prison if I don't settle his bill in a week."

Mr. Tickel burst into a fit of laughter.

"'Tis no laughing matter," said Blase angrily. "What is to be done, Tickel?"

"Take no notice of the letter; let him call at the end of the week. I'll fob him off, I warrant. Fifty years ago one might have dealt with such a villain in a summary manner; but the cursed levelling influences of these republican times prevent a gentleman kicking his own servant even. Don't spoil your digestion by giving the matter another thought, my young friend; we shall tide on for another month or so yet."

"And then?"

"Bolt, or do what I would have had you do a couple of months ago."

"What is that?"

Mr. Tickel drank his chocolate and carefully wiped his mouth before answering. He saw that the time for which he had been waiting had come.

"Take a wife, Blase. Marry and settle down to the peaceful enjoyment of a decent fortune. You are not fitted by nature for the kind of life you are leading now. You have no relish for its vicissitudes and perilous adventures. There's many a fine gentleman finds ease insipid. To him the chance of being haled off to a sponging house is what the risk of being discovered by an outraged husband is to a gallant. Peril is the salt which gives a savour to the life of the adventurous. But you are no adventurer. There's the stuff in you that sober worthy gentlemen

are made of. I see you in my mind's eye, Blase, with a family of children playing about your knee, and an honest pride in showing your contempt for the jests of little wits by loyal devotion to a worthy wife."

"The picture pleases me," said Blase.

"Then why not realize it? Why stand shilly shally betwixt the Fleet prison and the temple of Hymen? Here are two women whom with patient care I have kept all agog with expectation, either of them ready to snap up the handkerchief when you choose to throw it."

"You speak of Mrs. Thingamy and her niece."

"Mrs. Thingamy if you will, though Romsey is her name, and her niece Lydia Liston. There's no reason to pish! and phew! like that, Blase. What mortal objection can you have to a couple of unoffending women whom you've never seen?

The widow's as comfortable a woman as ever walked, and the niece is as pretty as paint. And I'll let you know, my young friend, that had I not put myself to infinite pains to prejudice the good woman against every man that has thrust himself into their company, the pair of 'em would have been snapped up ere this. Three and four times a week have I been to the little house with the bow front in Piccadilly, just to keep the coast clear for you; and a mighty job I have had to reconcile 'em to solitude."

"You have promised them that you would introduce me?"

"Yes; and a pretty string of excuses I have had to make for your want of manners in not accepting the invitation to visit 'em."

"You say the girl is pretty?"

"Pretty as a john-quill, and, which is more important—wealthy. But the widow

I recommend to you; there's none of this confounded tetchiness that you find in your green maids, and a fortune every penny as good as her niece's I warrant."

"Do they know that I haven't ten guineas in the world?"

"Why bless me, no; how should they? They know no one in London but their man of business and me; and it is not likely I should proclaim your deficiency any more than you will if you are sane."

"No, parson," said Blase after a few moments spent in thought; "I can't do it. To take a mean advantage of the simple credulity of these two silly rustics is a piece of dishonesty which——"

"Dishonesty, sir," exclaimed Mr. Tickel with a magnificent air of injured innocence; "dishonesty! Did I ever propose anything contrary to the precepts of the Church I have served? You need not laugh, Blase," he added, dropping his voice to a tone of

remonstrance; "you know well enough that old Tickel's the last man in the world to wish you to violate your conscientious principles. But just look at the matter in a reasonable manner. I have said you are heir to a baronetcy and an estate worth more than a thousand a year. It is not necessary for you to profess you have riches, nor to declare that you have none. If a woman chooses to give you her hand knowing no more nor less than the bare fact as you tell it, where is the harm that you have done? And tell me this, my young friend, is it more dishonest to marry and pay off your debts than to remain single and incur further liabilities which you and I know full well there is no likelihood of your being able to discharge?"

Blase could not reply. He rose impatiently and took a turn up and down the room; then stopping suddenly, as if

he had at length brought his wavering resolution to a stand—

"When are you next going to Piccadilly?"

"This afternoon!"

"Then, I will go with you."

CHAPTER II.

OF MRS. ROMSEY.

"I FEEL like a sheepstealer," said Blase when he stood with Mr. Tickel before the door of the little house in Piccadilly.

"Then upon my soul your looks belie you," replied the parson; "for you look vastly more like the sheep than the stealer. Pluck up your courage, my young friend."

A maid opened the door, and led the two gentlemen into the sitting-room, where with a bow she left them to inform her mistress of their arrival.

"Look around you, Blase," said Mr. Tickel in a low voice; "do not the objects which meet your eye speak more for the

character of the mistress here than any verbal eulogy?"

There were indeed abundant proofs of the genial and comfort-loving character of the inmates of the house on every side. The bleak and cheerless wintry sky was shut out by thick curtains, that lent a warm soft tone to the light that entered by the window, and gave effect to the dancing flame and glowing embers of the fire reflected in the polished furniture and the cut glass upon the side-board. A sofa and two easy chairs, covered in rich red plush, were drawn up to form a semi-circle before the fire. A cat sat upon the hassock on the hearthrug, blinking at the fire; a couple of kittens played with the tassel of the sofa-cushion. Sprays of holly decorated the chimney glass. Upon the side-board were decanters of wine and many plates of winter fruits, cakes of all sorts, nuts, and preserves in much

variety—a show that made the parson's little eyes sparkle like the facets of the crystal which they dwelt on. There were sand-bags in the windows, and a sand-bag at the foot of every door, and to still further protect one from any vagrant air that found its way into the room there were screens to extend behind the chairs and sofa.

Blase had scarcely finished his observation when the door opened and Mrs. Romsey entered. As he bowed in response to her very elegant and deep courtesy he obtained a fairly good impression of her personal charms. She was stout yet not ungainly, fair and fully forty, with blue eyes and a little turned-up nose, a rather long upper lip, a large and capable mouth, ruddy cheeks, and a pronounced double chin. There was unmistakable evidence of good temper and jollity in the expression of her face—and that was all. Indeed, there was little more in

her mind to indicate, for it was of that happy lower order which is exempted from suffering except in a transient fashion. It was this molluscous character of the woman which caused the heart of Blase to sink as he contemplated making her his wife. How could he fill the part of a decent husband to her? How could he make a constant and life-long companion of a woman who had no mental charm to compensate the absence of youth and beauty? "If this is the better of the two women," he said to himself, "the Lord preserve me from t'other."

"I trust, Mr. Godwin," said Mrs. Romsey, when the parson had formally introduced Blase, "that you are not suffering now from the defluxions."

"I thank you, madam," answered Blase, not a little astonished at this opening to conversation, "I was never better in my life."

"Thanks to the excellent cordial which

you were good enough to send him," said Mr. Tickel, nudging Blase by the elbow; and then he added in a whisper, "cough a little, Blase, for heaven's sake!"

"Yes; thanks to your excellent cordial," said Blase with a cough.

"Ah, you are still troubled with the asthmatic cough!" cried the good lady. "Sit upon the sofa, I entreat. Let me arrange the cushion for your back. Mr. Tickel, do bring the screen forward. I must have a pillow for your head, and make you some warm negus at once."

"Indeed I, as I said, never felt better in my life—thanks to your cordial," Blase protested, greatly embarrassed by these fussy attentions.

"A glass of port, with a rusk or a few dried muscadels," said Mr. Tickel gravely, "will be better than anything else for our convalescent."

"To be sure! How stupid of me not

to think of that at once. I remember our vicar, the Reverend Samuel Shagbag—don't discommode yourself I beg, Mr. Tickel, you must be quite fatigued with coming here, which I consider as a great honour, considering how slippery the roads are. I counted four hackney coaches down within an hour, and if you had heard the coachmen swear, Mr. Tickel, your ears would have been shocked; and Mr. Godwin still suffering from the cold too. I ought to feel very flattered I am sure, and I do; for as I said to Lydia, which reminds me that she will be down almost immediately, Mr. Godwin, and I shall have the pleasure of introducing my niece to you—a pleasure which we have looked forward to for a long time, I assure you, but could hardly expect, considering how many affairs you have had upon your hands lately. By the bye, I trust that your troublesome litigation is at an end, Mr. Godwin."

"Troublesome litigation?" Blase said in a tone of inquiry.

"I ventured to tell Mrs. Romsey," explained the parson, "of the vexatious suit you have had to bring against that vagabond Putley."

"Ah, true—Putley, to be sure. A mere trifle; I had almost forgotten it. The fellow hadn't a leg to stand on," said Blase, taking up the clue laid down for him by the parson.

"I *am* so glad. Dear me, what was I saying? I remember, I was speaking of poor Mr. Shagbag; when he was suffering with the gout he would drink nothing but port. If you will permit me, Mr. Godwin, I will put a few Jordan almonds on the same plate with some rusks and the muscadels, though if you would like to try a piece of home-made cake, or a Christmas pie——"

And so the good lady ambled easily on,

furrowing the fair field of conversation, and dropping the seeds of a mighty harvest of talk, while she busied herself in preparing a collection of delicacies for Blase, and pouring out wine for three. Meanwhile, the parson took the stand of a privileged friend, and warmed his back at the fire, occasionally winking at Blase and nodding approval of the lady at the sideboard with glances that seemed to say, "There's a woman for you! That's the sort of wife to make a man contented with his home."

When Mrs. Romsey had used all her powers of persuasion to make Blase eat what he did not want, and gave up the attempt in despair, she took the arm-chair facing Mr. Tickel, for she would by no means permit Blase to quit the sofa, and then with a plate and wine-glass on her lap she began to talk in earnest, confining herself more rigorously to the first subject

on which she entered, but diverging from it in innumerable parentheses, of which each presented a tempting theme for conversation, which might at any moment be resumed and enlarged upon. She seemed to Blase like a swollen stream, that overflows its banks at every shallow, and forms a hundred rivulets, which wind in and out and trickle on until they find their way to the lowest point, and then fall into the main current.

Blase sat patiently for half an hour, but when Mrs. Romsey broke off to beg he would try another glass of port, or some other remedy for the malady which rendered him so silent, he rose, protesting that an appointment compelled him to terminate his visit.

"But you have not seen my niece, Mr. Godwin!" cried Mrs. Romsey. "Dear me, where can she be? I have forgot all about her! How very strange! I beg

you to sit down while I seek her. She would never forgive us if you left without an introduction. She slipped quite out of my mind, I declare; but then that is not astonishing when Mr. Godwin is my visitor."

"What say ye, Blase?" said Mr. Tickel, when Mrs. Romsey had courtseyed herself out of the room. "Is she not a woman of a thousand?"

"Why, yes; and 'tis a mercy she is. With a woman like that no man would do well to make his dwelling in a fulling mill."

"What inconsistent stuff is this, my young friend? Why you are hard to please indeed! You yourself do not care to talk, yet you take exception to the pretty prattle of a woman which relieves you from all exertion. You don't have to open your mouth above once in an hour when Mrs. Romsey enters into conversation. You

will not let such a peevish objection stand in the way of your marriage, I hope."

"I will remain a bachelor rather than marry that fair lady, though I have to earn my living as keeper in an aviary of maccaws."

"Tut, tut! This is a bitter disappointment."

"Not to Mrs. Romsey, I am happy to think."

"Well, may the niece please you better, is my prayer."

The entrance of Miss Liston put an end to the discussion.

CHAPTER III.

OF LYDIA.

Miss Liston and Mr. Godwin stood face to face looking at each other with a mutual curiosity.

Miss Liston saw in Blase a young man, tall, well built, elegantly dressed, and strikingly handsome, with a face in which interest seemed to make a faint struggle to overcome lassitude and indifference. Whether it was the fashion in polite society for a gentleman in the presence of a young lady to affect indifference or interest was what Lydia wondered.

Blase saw in Miss Liston a young lady of faultless shape, of graceful carriage, and

pleasing features. If he did not see more than this at that moment—if he did not see that she was the most beautiful divinity that ever took the mortal form, it must be attributed to the fact that the waning light from without, and the glow from the fire, did not reveal a twentieth part of her charms.

Mr. Tickel stepped forward and solemnly introduced Mr. Godwin; whereupon he bowed, and she dropped a most profound courtesy, after which she put her arms behind her and stood demurely still, as if she were there for inspection.

"Do you think I shall suit?" she asked in a quaint, modish little voice, after standing there for the space of half a minute.

"My dear Lydia — my dearest child, think of the proprieties," expostulated Mrs. Romsey.

But Lydia did not move, and waited for Blase to reply.

"I—I—I do not," stammered Blase, "I do not quite understand you."

"Are you not Mr. Blase Godwin?"

"Certainly."

"And will you not probably be Sir Blase Godwin, baronet, and enjoy an estate in Dorsetshire with an income of fifteen hundred pounds a year?"

"If I live long enough."

"And have you not travelled all over Europe, and lived like a prince, and escaped from the toils spread for you by intriguing ladies of title, and lost night after night heavy sums at the gaming tables, until, shocked at your own immorality, you forswore play for ever, and travelled a long long way to ask the pardon of your grandfather?"

"Something of this is true," said Blase, shooting a glance at Mr. Tickel, which had it been anything more lethal than a glance would have silenced that unfortunate gentleman for evermore.

"And finally," pursued Lydia, relentlessly, "having decided upon taking a wife, have you not, after many tiresome delays, come to see if you could like my aunt or me sufficiently to marry one or the other?"

"Lydia!" exclaimed Mrs. Romsey, turning away in indignation.

But Lydia did not move; and Blase, greatly embarrassed, was bound to answer the question put to him.

"It would be to my discredit to deny the charge," he said.

"Then now you will understand me when I repeat my question.—Do you think I shall suit?"

Blase wished himself in the centre of the earth as he stood striving to find words to reply to this extraordinary and unlooked-for question. Suddenly Lydia brought her hands from behind her, and clapping them together she burst into a peal of

laughter that sounded like a chime of fairy bells, as, suddenly checking herself, she said in an altered voice :

"Mr. Godwin, if half the good things that have been told me to your credit are true, I ought to be punished for causing you such embarrassment. Indeed, I feel as guilty as one of those naughty little boys who mocked the good old gentleman with the grey hair, and were afterwards eaten by the she-bear. Poor little fellows; I used to think it was too severe a punishment for them, because it is natural for boys to be thoughtless and cruel — and girls too," she added, laughing again.

"It is unbecoming to speak lightly on such subjects, especially in the presence of a clergyman," said Mrs. Romsey. "But then, as I have said before, Mr. Tickel, you are more indulgent than most divines; especially the late vicar, the Rev. Samuel Shagbag, who I well remember when he

had the gout was——" And then Mrs. Romsey started upon a conversational voyage carrying the parson with her, and so leaving Lydia and Blase to pursue their separate course.

"But why did my question embarrass you?" asked Lydia, seating herself by the window.

"It was so unexpected," Blase answered, taking a chair near her.

"Then you did not give me credit for being straightforward?"

"That question is more embarrassing than the other," said Blase, laughing.

"And yet when you decided to see me you must have felt satisfied that I must be straightforward and good, or you wouldn't have taken this trouble upon yourself."

"I may have well credited you with every good quality, and yet not expected you to put a question to me which perhaps

no other young lady under the sun would have asked."

"But the question being asked, I do not see why you should be so troubled to find an answer. Could you answer it now?"

"I can only answer—I do not know."

"That is the answer I hoped for the moment I saw you. I have had two wooers—country gentlemen, and it took me, oh, such a time to find out what they wooed me for; and at length I discovered that one was in love with my money, and the other with my prettiness, and neither thought for one moment whether I had the heart and soul which would make one a good wife. If I had put the question to them that I asked you, they would have said yes at once, and saved me a great deal of trouble."

"Your ideas are very original, Miss Liston."

"Original! How?"

"They are unlike the ideas of most young ladies of your age."

"Are you sorry that I am not like other girls?" she asked quickly.

"Not at all."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, and then she said, "I daresay I shall get more like ordinary girls in time. I should not wish you, I should not wish anyone, to think me wanting in modesty."

"It would make me unhappy to be suspected of doing you such an injustice."

"Tell me how you expected me to behave myself."

"I expected you would meet me with a simper and a blush, sit very upright on your chair,"—Miss Liston was leaning back easily, and her pretty feet were crossed and just peeping from the hem of her skirt—"agree with me that the weather to-day is not what it was yesterday, and say yes and no to the string of

questions which I should make; this, with a little more simpering and blushing, was as much as I expected of you in the first interview."

"Then you must think me forward and bold to take the initiative; put all the questions and leave the simpering and blushing for you to perform."

Blase laughed.

"Most young ladies would prefer to play the more agreeable part that you have chosen but for their timidity."

"I never was timid, and I cannot understand why good and pretty girls should be so."

"Why do you particularise good and pretty girls?"

"Because they have nothing to fear; one can see that a girl who has thoughts she is ashamed of, must fear to reveal them, and that a plain girl should be silent for fear of ridicule. But all girls are not quiet

from timidity; in some it springs from a natural modesty. Oh, I have known girls unobtrusive and reserved, whose charms were only known to those who sought them; like the first violets that one finds beneath the foliage, and which are ten times sweeter for the seeking, and infinitely preferable to the later scentless flowers that lift themselves up boldly for everyone to see, and lack the deep rich sweetness of their modest sisters." She sat musing for a moment, then, "I suppose every girl has her faults, and wishes to be better than she is."

"There are very few who would admit it."

"I do. I *should* like to be a nice violetty kind of girl. But I have been spoilt."

Blase saw his way to a compliment here, but before he could speak she resumed:

"Poor papa spoilt me. He liked to see

me tearing about on a pony; he never whipped me when I got into mischief. Then I was always so strong and well: I could not keep quiet. When I went to school it was just as bad; I was never smacked. I deserved punishment over and over again, but the dear old Misses Twitchet were paid to be kind to me by poor papa, and they never made me go without my supper, or stand in a corner, or wear a dunce's cap, or stay in the school-room on half holiday, for fear I should dislike the school. And the girls were never spiteful to me; that was because I had so much pocket money to give away. Everything I did was right, and if it hadn't been for one dear sweet girl that I loved with——" She stopped, her chin twitched, she gulped down a sob, one of many, many like testimonies of love that had risen from her tender heart to the memory of that dead friend, and then

wiping her eyes with a little hysteric laugh at her own folly, she said—"I should have been a worse girl than I am. I do believe I was the most ill-mannered girl in the whole school, but no one would see it; and I stayed there till I was seventeen —that was in last February—getting thoroughly confirmed in my badness. How could I help it? I knew no better. A French gentleman came every week to teach me dancing and polite deportment, and oh, what a stupid little gentleman he was. He couldn't do anything with me. I could dance ten times better when he was gone; and in revenge for having to turn my toes out for half an hour in the afternoon, I turned them in for the rest of the evening, so that it is a wonder I don't walk like a duck. He never told us how girls should behave in society; very likely he did not know; and when I went home for the holidays I saw no one but my

aunt, and a few middle aged people, whose manners were middle aged too. There was no one I cared for, or who cared for me sufficiently to give me good advice. Always I did what I liked, and if it was wrong people carefully concealed it from me. So I got into the way of fearing no one, and saying straight out what I thought, and obeying without reflection the first impulse that I felt. I had not left school and been at home with my aunt a month before one of the middle aged people brought a young gentleman, who professed to fall desperately in love with me. That made me feel that I was a woman, and a school girl no longer. For the first time I began to think seriously. When I discovered my lover's motive, I thought more seriously; and the motive of the second made me think still more seriously. I had no one to confide in; I had to fight it all out alone. Then I felt the want of a

friend, felt that a true friend was the need of my life."

She was silent again. Blase dropped his eyes from her face; they fell on her hands, which were clasped over the elbow of the chair. It struck him that he had never seen such beautiful hands and fingers, not even in the fine exhibition of pictures at the new Somerset House.

"It is the need of every woman's life," continued Lydia; "and to have a friend all to one's self is the end of marriage, as it seems to me. And as the country gentleman turned out so bad, I said to my aunt that I would come to London and find a better. But another thought struck me—'if I am to have a good husband I must deserve one. For the best men will naturally take the best women; and if I am not particularly nice I shall have to content myself with a not over nice companion.'" She laughed merrily and

then checking herself suddenly, as a grave thought came into her mind, she continued:

"I thought if Mary had lived she would have won the best husband in the world; and to win as good I must be as sweet and lovable as she. And that is why I do not wish to be odd or peculiar, and why I want to cure myself of the habits that have grown upon me by being always encouraged to do what comes first to my mind. So I'm rather ashamed at this moment of the manner in which I behaved just now." She spoke with droll gravity. "But you see it was not all my fault. You had told Mr. Tickel that you might marry me or aunt, which ever suited you, and Mr. Tickel told my aunt, and my aunt told me, and so there was really no secret about it; and it seemed to me quite foolish to pretend we did not know what intentions we had, and play at cross purposes for a

long while to no good end. It is just in keeping with my old stupid habit of saying straight out what I meant. I am not surprised now that Mrs. Romsey was shocked; and I should not be at all surprised if you liked her better than you like me."

"Indeed," said Blase, dropping his voice discreetly, "I have no partiality for her."

"You are quite sure? Do not fear that you will disappoint me, because, of course, at present I have no sort of feeling for you.'

"But I already have for you."

"I should like aunty to marry again. She must have someone to talk to when I go away."

"She won't have me," Blase said in low, impressive tones.

"Well, I will tell her so. For one thing she cannot say that I did not give her the first chance, can she? I would not come down until she fetched me."

"My gracious me!" exclaimed Mrs. Romsey, in a shrill tone of terror. "Mr. Godwin sitting near the window, and not yet recovered from the defluxions! What *have* I been thinking about?"

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH BLASE AND THE PARSON TAKE THE LADIES TO DRURY LANE THEATRE.

"WELL, my young friend," said Mr. Tickel, when they were walking away from the house in Piccadilly, "which is it to be."

"Miss Liston, if she will have me!"

"Hum. 'Tis useless, I suppose, to raise objections; yet I wish it had been t'other way about. The fair widow would have snapped at you, and you might have married her before she knew where she was; whereas the Lord only knows how long the younger lady will keep you dangling about. A girl is as fickle and as finnikin as a butterfly in its pursuit

of sweets; first fluttering hither then thither, now up in the air, now down on the earth, backwards and forwards in one everlasting jiggle, and at the close of the day is as ill content as at the opening; whereas your widow is as sure as a hawk. She spies her quarry, swoops down on it—crack! and in a twinkling the business is finished. However, one mustn't expect the wisdom of Solomon in a young fellow of your age, and we must make the most of a chance when we let slip a certainty; so follow my advice, Blase, stand no nonsense, take the upper hand, and bring missy to the scratch before Lady-day."

"The manly thing to do," said Blase, answering some inward question rather than replying to the observation of Mr. Tickel, to whom indeed he had given but slight attention, "The manly course would be, to tell these people exactly how I stand with regard to fortune."

"And destroy my character for candour and honesty, after I have striven for two mortal months to set up yours. That is manly with a witness to it, isn't it?"

"The girl herself is candid and frank, she will like me none the less for telling the plain truth."

"It seems you are troubled with a deaf ear this morning, my young friend. I ask you again, if my character is not to be considered. The girl may be simple enough, but hang me if her aunt is. You think her a fool, but she is not. She is as cautious as a cat at a milk-pan. She would not believe that you were heir to your father's title and estate, until she had made inquiries through her agent. A pretty piece of work I have had to bolster up her faith. And if you undo what I have done, she will close her door to us, and there's an end of it for you and for me."

"To save your credit, I can stay away from the house and leave you to make any explanation that will support your character."

"Let's have no more of this niminy piminy stuff, Blase. Have we not settled already that your bills are to be paid? Common honesty demands no less. As for the girl, if she is willing to marry you, why should you oppose obstacles that none but a ninny would dream of? If she finds out after you are married that you are not so rich as she expected, 'tis no fault of yours. You never said you were rich. Lay all the blame on old Tickel's shoulders if you will—they're broad enough to bear the load. But for the sake of the poor devils that you owe money to, let the revelation come in the natural course after you are married."

Blase was not deceived by the specious argument. He knew right from wrong,

and in yielding to the temptation laid before him by Mr. Tickel, he knew that he was committing a fault.

He called the following week at the small house in Piccadilly, and was received with a hearty welcome; and from that time his visits became more frequent. Yet he said nothing to show his real position; on the contrary, he did what was necessary to sustain the illusion that he had ample means at his disposal. The small voice of conscience ceased to be heard, as the necessity for deception increased. The necessity arose from his rapidly growing love for Lydia, and his perception of Mrs. Romsey's character and her influence over her niece.

Mrs. Romsey had the strong prejudices of weak judgment. It required but slight proofs to win her esteem or to provoke her aversion. She liked and disliked with equal thoroughness. While her mind was

undecided whether to trust a person implicitly, or not to trust him at all, she was suspicious of the worst. Blase saw that if he removed the tinsel which Mr. Tickel had so liberally laid on him, Mrs. Romsey would jump to the conclusion, that the metal beneath was still more worthless, and use all her efforts to make Lydia believe as she did.

That her influence over Lydia should be great was only natural. Lydia doubted herself, she loved her aunt, and her aunt was an indefatigable talker. And a powerful factor can be made of even the silliest talk if it is employed in large quantities. Possibly Blase over estimated Lydia's submissiveness, by feeling how readily he in her position should yield a point to obtain silence.

How could he risk losing Lydia—he whose nature it was to love the primrose path and hate the thorny way? He never

met her but that the joy of meeting was shadowed by the thought that in a little hour he must leave her; he never left her but that his sadness was tinged with joy to think that in twenty-four hours he should meet her again. Every day he discovered some fresh charm in her. Now it was the beautiful oval of her face, now the lovely outline of her head, the rich, soft texture of her skin, the curling lashes of her eyes, the wanton waving of her hair, the line of her chin and throat, the Cupid's bow of her lips, their ruddy fulness, and the pearly teeth they could not hide; and then the compass of her voice, now pathetically deep and low, now gaily clear and high. And oh, the downy softness of her long, rounded arms and the subtle curves of the wrist! and oh, the gentle heaving of her perfect bosom! Her eyes were an endless source of wonder and admiration. He was their slave. Their

glance was his law. As they shone, so he was gay or sober. At any time since he came to manhood a warm glance had kindled his susceptible heart; but Lydia's eyes, when they were mischievous, set his very soul aflame. "There is not a woman in the world so beautiful as Lydia Liston," he declared; and perhaps his judgment was better than Mr. Tickel's, who would have given the apple to Mrs. Romsey.

But it was not alone the physical beauty of Lydia that entranced him. Her disposition, her heart, her soul were unlike any other girl's, and therefore, of course, the better. She was so downright honest in all she did and said and thought; so free from conceit and vanity and meanness of every kind; so deeply affectionate, so earnest and good, and yet so free from sentimentality and priggishness. He saw no single fault in her; but then, he was neither a sculptor nor a woman.

He loved her none the less because she showed, as yet, no sign of love for him. Sometimes he thought she never would love him. But that very hopelessness made him love the more. It was despair that gave piquancy to the love of Pygmalion for his beautiful cold statue; it was despair that made Apollo weep over the branches of poor metamorphosed Daphne. Then, again, sometimes he believed that she would ultimately love him. He felt convinced that, although she talked of marriage and of love, she had only a theoretical knowledge of the grand passion of life. He was so sure that she had cared nothing for her country suitors that he could think of them calmly and without jealousy. A girl full of health, and with a strongly emotional temperament such as she had, must one day love, and with a vigour and intensity impossible to a less earnest nature than hers. She was des-

tined, he believed, not to cut up her heart in a thousand fragments and to scatter it freely amongst her admirers, but to give it whole to one, and to one only. It was an intoxicating delight to think that he of all men should be the chosen one to be so loved by her, who was of all women the most lovable. And, with that prospect before him, how could he give up the chase?

Lydia as yet did not love him, it is true; but she liked him, and that was a good way towards loving him. She liked him ever so much more than she liked Mr. Tickel; she liked him better than any man she had ever seen except poor papa. She admired his appearance as much as in her school days she had admired the head of Diomed put before her to copy in crayon; she liked his gaiety, his gentleness, his courage, his generosity; and she was conscious of a certain indefinable pleasure

which possessed her when she felt his eyes upon her. She could not remember any similar sensation when poor papa gazed at her; from which it will be seen that it wanted only a little more perception, on her part, for Blase to supplant even poor papa from his supremacy.

It came out one day that Lydia had never seen a play acted.

"Shouldn't you like to go to a theatre?" asked Blase.

"Oh!" she cried, clapping her hands—"oh! I *should* like to go—but"—she pursed up her lips and glanced significantly at Mrs. Romsey, who was sipping tea and talking with Mr. Tickel.

"Have you any objection to theatres, Mrs. Romsey?" asked Blase.

"Theatres?" said Mrs. Romsey in a tone of grave consideration. "Well, I have scarcely made up my mind on the subject. In the country, you see, I was

taught to consider them as vastly immoral; but since coming to London I have found country morality to be so greatly at fault in many things that I cannot directly tell whether to believe my early teachings in this respect correct or otherwise. Still I am told that the side boxes are quite free from draughts and excessively comfortable; but what is *your* opinion, Mr. Tickel?"

"Madame," said Mr. Tickel, catching a glance from Blase, "it is true that some performances are unfit for ladies to attend. Such I consider the Italian Opera." This was a species of entertainment that the parson detested, for he could neither keep awake nor asleep during the performance. "Such also I consider those performances where live and dangerous beasts are brought upon the scene; but those houses which present the classic works of master minds, such as Wycherly, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Shadwell, and others, are deserving

of support by all who would expand the reason and elevate the affections."

"You find no moral objection to Shakespeare?" said Blase.

"No; Shakespeare is good, in moderation; I except, however, the play of 'Julius Cæsar.'"

"Then will you permit me, Mrs. Romsey, to take a box at the Drury Lane Theatre for to-morrow night, when Mr. Kemble and his sister are to play in Shakespeare's tragedy of 'Macbeth?'"

The proposal was agreed to, Mrs. Romsey stipulating only that the body should be fortified against the mental strain by a good dinner beforehand.

Lydia threw aside her knitting and stood up before Blase, her eyes aglow with the eager excitement of a child. For a moment she felt as if she must give him a hug and a kiss, but she was restrained through those notions of propriety she had

been learning from books and observation, by which she had set herself resolutely to govern the actions of her life.

"Oh, if you were only my brother," she said in a low voice and with a sigh of regret, and then she ran off to bestow her kisses on Mrs. Romsey. From those caresses she broke off abruptly, crying in a tone of dismay, "Aunty! we have nothing to wear! I must run upstairs at once and have a good rummage;" and therewith she ran away, leaving Blase to regret that he had deprived himself of half an hour's delight by broaching the subject so early.

Of the four hundred and fifty pounds given by Aunt Gertrude to Blase, four hundred had been lodged with the agent to pay for the commission when it was forthcoming; fifty remained in the silk purse. Pressing as the need had been, Blase had not yet used one of the sacred notes, but now to give pleasure to such a

good, sweet girl as Lydia, he felt that he might use a few pounds without compunction; and surely if the end can justify the means, he did no wrong in this. Slipping the purse in his pocket the following morning, he hurried off to Drury Lane, where he found that by a most fortunate accident the best box in the house was to let, though all the rest had been taken. He paid the price without wincing, happy indeed at his good fortune, for nothing less than the best seat in the house for Lydia would have satisfied him. Then he went to Jacob Reeves the florist, and ordered the handsomest bouquet that was to be had.

"Oh! how lovely!" exclaimed Lydia, when the flowers were put in her hands. "Oh, how nice!—how very nice"—she looked up at Blase—"you are. Look, aunty! did you ever see such lovely flowers in your life?"

"Sweetly pretty, my dear," replied

Mrs. Romsey. "*De*licious!" she added, speaking to Mr. Tickel, with reference to a sweetmeat from the box which she was tasting.

Lydia, turning the bouquet round and looking at it first with her head on this side then on that, seemed at a loss for words; presently she said:

"I have not thanked you for this gift, Mr. Godwin, for indeed I don't know how to. If you knew how fond I am of flowers, and how sensible I am to kindness, you would understand how difficult I find it to put my thoughts in proper words. All I can say is—thank you." She held out her hand, and looked him full in the face with her sweet, open eyes.

He took her fingers trembling to his lips; and when he raised his head he saw that she was looking down at the flowers, and that a flush of pink had covered her face.

"Does she love me?" he asked himself, as without a word, without daring to look in his face, she turned away to put the bouquet in the box from which it had been taken.

She scarcely spoke during dinner; she ate nothing. But this was not surprising, as Mrs. Romsey fully explained, narrating many instances of her own abstemiousness before going to feasts and fêtes, and happily making Lydia's silence unnoticeable by her own garrulity.

The ladies withdrew directly after dinner to make their toilettes; and in this delightful occupation Lydia forgot her strange embarrassment, forgot Blase and all minor things. She was as pleased with her own appearance as Narcissus with his. Everything she added to her toilet was a triumph; and she smiled at herself in the glass like the veriest coquette. She was even annoyed to find that her slippers

went on too easily, though certainly when they were on it gratified her to find that her feet still looked small and pretty in them. Her gloves pleased her greatly; she had it from the glover that they were of the very latest fashion; they came almost up to the elbow, and were of the most delicate turquoise blue to harmonize with the trimming of her white satin and muslin dress; the colour made her arm above the kid look whiter than ever. It was difficult to decide whether she should wear the new fashioned turban and ostrich feathers which she had bought in the morning, or the little lace cap which everyone had so admired at the party given in her honour when she left school. Very naturally she ultimately decided upon the uglier but more fashionable head-dress, which undoubtedly had a stately effect if one held the head high. Deeply concerned in such absurd trifles as these she

spent a whole hour, and with such interest to herself that when her maid came up with the terrifying news that the chariot was at the door, it seemed that she had not left the dining-room but a quarter of an hour before. Had she possessed all those admirable qualities with which the fancy of Blase endowed her, she would have been heartily ashamed of herself; but being only a woman—whatever Blase might think to the contrary—she felt extremely pleased with the result of her endeavours, and ran down to the drawing-room with an eager desire for admiration, and presented herself before those who had been waiting so long and patiently for her with a flutter of pride and pleasure in her heart.

Beautiful she was judged even by such an impartial critic as Mr. Tickel; but her beauty bewildered Blase. It was not, perhaps, because her charms were dis-

played to greater advantage in this dress, for he could not take his eyes from her face; it was the exultant and radiant happiness of the girl that dazzled him. Lydia enjoyed the loud admiration of Mrs. Romsey and Mr. Tickel, and even the whispered approval of the servants peeping through the door, and she felt disappointed that Blase said nothing; for now that vanity had driven sentiment from her mind, she failed to appreciate the more sincere homage of his silence.

"How quiet you are," she said, as he led her down to the chariot. "Don't you like my dress?"

"To tell you the truth, I have scarcely looked at it," Blase replied.

"Because you see nothing in a woman's dress to admire."

"On the contrary, when in the woman's dress I see you, I find so much to admire that my eyes can feed on nothing else."

"That is gracefully turned; now why couldn't you say that before?"

"I cannot say. I plead guilty to being silent when I feel deeply. Who that has an ear for music would cry 'how beautiful!' when his senses were drinking in a lovely harmony? And then all exquisite objects make the beholder feel his insignificance. I fancy the Latmos shepherd dared not open his lips when the goddess first stepped from her crescent to his side."

"If that shepherd boy atoned for his silence as you have, Mr. Godwin, the goddess ceased to scold him, I daresay."

They stepped into the carriage, and there was an end to the conversation, for the rattle of the wheels over the stones silenced even Mrs. Romsey.

The approaches to the theatre were filled with handsome carriages, and a crowd of curious idlers was collected by the entrance to see the company set down. To Lydia,

whose experience of London life had been limited—thanks to the discreet management of Mr. Tickel—to looking in shops and walking in the park, the lights moving in every direction, the collisions and narrow escapes of collision with other vehicles, the hoarse cries of the drivers, the bustling crowds of people, of whom many threaded their way amongst the vehicles at the imminent peril of being crushed or run over, the banging-to of doors, and the roar of human voices was not a little terrifying. "If it is like this outside, what will it be within?" she asked. It was like being transported suddenly to a fairy palace to pass from this tumult into the quiet and orderly crush room, with its splendid decorations, and its multitude of beautiful lamps that shone down on a throng of ladies and gentlemen moving with graceful composure, and who, from the elegance of their manner and the richness of their

costume, might all be princes and princesses. It seemed to her that she must look quite plain and poor in the presence of ladies so richly jewelled, and she felt heartily ashamed of her recent vanity. This humiliation might have damped the pleasure of the evening had she not fortunately caught sight of herself in one of the long mirrors, and felt convinced that there was nothing there to be ashamed of; but that the womanly fault of her nature, her vanity, may not be overrated it is only fair to say that she came to the conclusion that the graceful and elegant girl on whom her eyes rested was becomingly dressed, before she recognized that she was criticising her own reflection.

"Prodigious fine, upon my word!" exclaimed Mrs. Romsey, as she stood in the box and looked round the house. "And they have given us a most convenient place."

"Mr. Godwin took care of that, madam," said Mr. Tickel. "Yonder is the king's box, and this is the next best."

"He must have paid a high price for it?"

"A hundred guineas or so, not more," said Mr. Tickel, cavalierly.

"A hundred guineas for a night's amusement! I fear Mr. Godwin is a sad spendthrift."

"I will not deny that he is a spendthrift, when his friends' convenience is in question, but only then. Will you believe it, madam, that the chariot we came in was hired, and that the fellow who has just left the box is the only servant he will keep."

"I like him none the less for that, I assure you. Now Mr. Romsey was a man of quite another sort, as you may judge from what I am about to tell you——"

Lydia looked round the house in wide-

eyed wonder, and asked a hundred whispered questions of Blase before her curiosity was satisfied. Then she sat down and became conscious that many spy-glasses were turned upon her.

"Everyone seems to be looking at us. I think it must be my bouquet."

"I think it must be you," said Blase, laughing.

Lydia raised one hand carefully to assure herself that her head-dress was not out of order, and said anxiously:

"Can you tell me why they look at me?"

"Because there is nothing else in the house so pleasant to look at."

With a long-drawn "Oh!" Lydia flushed. "But 'tis rude to stare in this manner, right in my very face," she said.

"Here gentlemen are privileged to stare at ladies, and ladies for the most part submit pretty willingly to observation.

If they object to staring 'tis when some young and pretty upstart comes amongst them and draws all eyes to her."

"But to stare so openly—you would not be so rude?"

"Indeed, I would."

Lydia smiled. She did not seem displeased by this candid confession. She looked down at her bouquet, and arranged a flower with the end of her little finger.

"How foolish!" she said softly.

Then the play began, and her attention never wandered for an instant from the scene. Blase sat at the end of the box, and so with his back to the partition, he could keep his face towards the stage and his eyes upon his sweetheart's face. How exquisitely beautiful it was, not only in its colour and form, and as a mere object of physical beauty, but as the index of a sweet and sympathetic soul, a delicately sensitive mind. Thus thought Blase, and

only he perhaps could have seen so much, for, from the first, Lydia's features were set in an expression of awful interest. He might have found a much wider range of expression in the countenance of Mrs. Romsey, whose mobile features seemed to reflect every gesture of the actors on the stage, while her sympathetic soul was made evident by subdued ejaculations such as, "There now!" "Tut, tut, tut!" "Oh, dear, dear, dear!" "Poor fellow!" "Oh my, oh my, oh my!" "Another dead!" "Shocking to be sure!" and the like.

"A very melancholy business, madam," said Mr. Tickel, when the curtain fell on the first act.

"Dreadful indeed, sir," said Mrs. Romsey. "'Tis quite a relief now the curtain's drawn that it is not real. I cannot say I like it so far. There never was such a fool as I am with regard to taking life. I assure you I never would accept an

invitation to a farmhouse before I was assured that there was to be no pig killing. The sound of the poor creature's sufferings even when he is having a ring put through his nose—— Thank you, I think I will try one of the sweetmeats. Lydia dear, will you?"

Lydia shook her head. Since the fall of the curtain she had not said a word.

"Would you like to go home, dear; you look pale, and I don't think we've come to the worst of it?"

"No, no; oh no! I am quite well, and I am very much interested; but I can't talk and don't ask me to have any sweetmeats, please," she said, with a feeling of disgust for everything that was commonplace. "How great and grand it is," she said to Blase, who had wisely refrained from speaking; and she could say no more.

In the next terrible act Mrs. Romsey, after watching the preparations for

Duncan's murder up to the appearance of Lady Macbeth in the second scene, took her chair to the back of the box and covered her ears with her hands. There were, indeed, many who, from the entrance of Mrs. Siddons, followed the acting of the tragedy with painful unwillingness—who would have turned their eyes from the scene, but for the irresistible fascination which the culminating horror exercised over their minds. The effect of reality was so great that at times the audience was betrayed into sympathetic movement with the actor. When Lady Macbeth took the dagger and entered the murdered Duncan's chamber, there followed a silence of fully two minutes, Macbeth saying not a word, but watching the door by which she had gone; the audience watched also with a feeling of apprehension that was simply terrible. Had the theatre been entirely empty the silence could not have

been more complete. Then the awful stillness was broken by a single knock, causing Macbeth, and with him every creature in the audience, to shrink back in terror. As Lydia recoiled in her chair she stretched aside her hand unconsciously, as if for protection. Blase took it in his, and held it until the curtain fell, and then she looked down wondering how it had come there.

"You were frightened and seemed to need an assurance that you were amongst friends," he said, in explanation, as he regretfully relinquished her hand.

"Indeed, I felt like a child," she replied.

In the next act he did not wait for her to stretch out her hand; he stole it stealthily from her lap; and she knew it and made no attempt to take her hand away. It was pleasant to be thus warmly linked with life and safety in the midst of so much death and peril. Her mind was too fully occupied with the play to

let her think why this should be so, or to trouble itself with questions as to the strict propriety of suffering her hand to be held by him. She only knew that it gave her courage and happiness. After a while she went so far as to exchange thoughts in a mute language through the medium of their united fingers. In the more terrible situations the pressure on his side was a little greater. That surely meant, "do not fear, I am beside you," to which she replied by another pressure which she intended to say, "thank you, I feel quite safe." And it astonished her to find how agreeable this simple intercourse was. One other thing gratified her in an equally incomprehensible manner, and that was to observe that Blase kept his eyes upon her much more than he did upon Mrs. Siddons.

CHAPTER V.

BLASE AND LYDIA TALK ABOUT MARRIAGE.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you to-day," said Lydia when Blase met her the day after going to Drury Lane.

"More glad to-day than yesterday?" Blase asked, his eyes responding with fervour to the girl's warm greeting.

"Yes. Yesterday I had the theatre to look forward to and my dress to think about; but to-day there was nothing to hope for but your coming. That doesn't sound very flattering does it?" she said with her gay laugh; "but it is just the truth. You can't tell how miserable I have been all the morning—thinking about last

night and regretting that it was all past and over. If it had not snowed so heavily I should have hired a hackney coach to drive me to Drury Lane simply to look at the outside of the theatre. And I wanted somebody who thought just as I did about that noble tragedy to speak to me and make me unconscious of the commonplace stupid things about me; but Mrs. Romsey has been provokingly talkative upon uninteresting subjects, and has said nothing nice about last night, except—" she checked herself abruptly.

"Except what?" Blase asked after a moment's silent anticipation.

"Oh, something agreeable about you which it might not be quite right for me to repeat as you are a gentleman. She does not understand tragedy and dislikes it. So you see why I looked forward to your visit; and now let us talk all about Macbeth."

"I thought possibly you might like to read the play, so I brought a copy. Will you be good enough to accept it?"

He offered a volume, the best he had been able to buy in a morning devoted to its discovery.

"'Tis the very book I longed for when I opened my eyes this morning. It shows how much our sympathies are alike for you to have guessed my wish. What a beautiful little book. Mr. Godwin, I don't think I ever knew anyone more kind than you are!"

"'Tis a sort of selfishness."

"Selfishness!—to be thoughtful of another's happiness."

"There is no greater happiness for me to seek, than that of making you happy."

Lydia's face was grave for a moment and then, as she got to the root of this paradox, the beautiful curve of her lips altered, the dimple deepened in her chin,

and a thousand twinkling lights danced in her happy eyes, and as she bent her head she smoothed the cover of the book in her lap as if it were sentient, and could appreciate the significant caress.

They were alone and seated face to face. By leaning forward Blase could possess himself of that white caressing hand. Had any other woman sat in Lydia's place he would have done so at once after such encouragement; but he hesitated now because he loved Lydia as he had never loved any other woman. This reluctance seemed to himself inconsistent. He had taken her hand last night; why should he not take it now? If he loved her better than all other women why should he be more backward in winning her than them? The experience of many conquests had taught him to attack boldly, and take advantage of the first opportunity. Lydia was silent, still occupied with her

thoughts, and the cover of the book; was that not an invitation for him to go on? He determined to think it was; and bending forward put out his hand to take hers. Lydia perceived the movement and neatly raising the book on which her hand rested she said:

"Will you read to me Mr. Godwin?"

"That is what—" the lie died upon his lips—"If it will give you pleasure," he said.

"It will give me pleasure," she said, looking at him now with soft grave eyes. There was not a sign in her face of the smile that had so lately played upon it.

He took the book and sat abashed, turning over the pages aimlessly for a minute or so, then suddenly closing it he said looking up into Lydia's face.

"Will you take back the book? 'tis happier in your hands. I cannot read just now."

She took the book back on her lap, and waited for him to continue.

"I think you knew my intention when I approached your hand," he said.

"I think I do. 'Twas to take mine."

"And that displeased you?"

"It gave me pain to think I had lost your respect."

"Why should you think me wanting in respect in seeking to take your hand?"

"Because I should feel myself wanting in respect if I permitted it."

"You did not think so last night."

"Last night I did not think at all—that must excuse me if I did wrong."

"But you did not do wrong! I fancy you obeyed the impulse of a generous heart."

"There are conditions which oblige us to restrain our impulses I think."

"I do not. Can anything that is

natural be wrong? and was it not natural that I should wish to take your hand?"

"The feeling is also natural which makes me shrink from a familiarity our present position does not justify. Our acquaintance is scarcely three weeks old: why my Exeter swains had known me twice as long before they dared to go so far."

"Did they take your hand?" asked Blase fiercely.

"Oh, they were quite as eager as you: one indeed was for putting his arm round my waist and kissing my cheek."

"A hound! you—you didn't suffer that. did you Miss Liston?"

"Suppose I did resist—at first," Lydia said dropping her head to hide the mischievous twinkle of her eyes, "but persuaded by arguments such as you have used I came to see that I might at least give up my hand without indelicacy——"

"But you have said you did not love either of them."

"Have I said that I love you?" she asked quickly.

Blase blushed to the roots of his hair.

"Will you forgive me?" he asked presently, "I was wrong from the first, and I knew I was wrong, and I have made my fault worse by trying to defend it."

Joy lit up her face again; she was glad, not because she had vanquished him in argument, but because he had re-established her belief in his honesty and candour.

"Now you shall have my hand," she cried with fervour, giving him that pretty object of contention.

He took her hand and bent over it in tender reverence and then restored it to her lap. He might have retained it, he might even have drawn her to him and kissed her, and she could not have been angry in the humour that now possessed

her. Her heart was full of love and kindness, and she was blind to the inconsistency of her own moods. But his self-restraint did more than any kisses to strengthen their mutual love and knit their hearts together.

She leaned back in her chair twining her fingers until they whitened with the strain, and gave herself up to the full enjoyment of this new and exquisite delight with which her bosom heaved.

She imagined that her feelings were known only to herself, but Blase sitting opposite and looking into her tell-tale face read her heart. More sweetly than the softest voice her dark eyes said, "I love you."

His eyes were not slow to respond, and the result of this communication of ideas might have been fatal to the control that Lydia so prized but that in this critical moment the kitten which had been playing

at Lydia's feet scrambled up into her lap, and broke the spell. She lifted it in her two hands, and nestling her soft round chin in its fur murmured her affection in that strange woman's language which is supposed to be comprehensible to the intelligence of kittens and babies alike.

"Now let us talk about Macbeth," said Lydia, when the kitten had scratched its way to independence over her shoulder and got on to the table behind.

"Don't you think it will be more agreeable to talk about ourselves?" asked Blase.

"With all my heart," she replied gaily. "Whom shall we talk about—you or me?"

"Let us begin with you. I want you to tell me all about those fellows at Exeter."

"With pleasure. One was the son of a squire who had I can't tell you how many acres he intended to give his son—one day. The other was the son of nobody

in particular, I believe. He was said to be the handsomest man in Exeter—and you know we Exeter people are rather vain of our beauty. I think he was taller than you and stouter, and he had a very fine voice for singing. He was tolerably well read, and had all his coats cut in London. He was——"

"I am not anxious to have their portraits," said Blase. "Hang 'em!" he added under his breath, grinding his heel into a particular spot in the carpet, which he steadfastly regarded.

"I thought you wished to know *all* about them," said Lydia demurely, casting a malicious glance at the sombre countenance of Blase.

"That was merely a figure of speech," he laughed, and then, in desperation, rushed to the point. "I say, Miss Liston, you didn't let them have your hand, did you?"

"Only one." Lydia bent low over her

knee. It was much as she could do to restrain her laughter.

Blase, glancing up, saw only the top of her head.

"That was the handsome buck, I suppose?" he said ruefully.

Lydia nodded her head.

What did her silence and her bowed head imply?

Blase tapped his foot upon the floor in moody silence.

"I couldn't help it," pleaded Lydia.

"Of course *you* were not to blame. A young girl just home from school could not be expected to know about that sort of thing."

"And when he put his arm round me," she faltered, "I—I——"

"You let him have your hand," said Blase, anxious to get to the worst.

"I did. It was rude, and unladylike, and unbecoming, and I thought then, as

you think now, that I couldn't do wrong to obey the impulse of my heart."

"Ah, but I frankly admit that I was wrong in saying so; and there are conditions in which restraint is proper."

"I did not see it then, and I gave him—oh! such a slap in the face."

"You did?" exclaimed Blase, springing from his chair. "Oh, you noble, brave girl!" and then he joined heartily in Lydia's laughter, although it was at his own expense.

"And the other; did you smack his face too?" Blase inquired, still laughing.

"No; I dismissed him the first day he took the liberty to call me Lydia."

Thought Blase, "This is a narrow escape for me," for he had it in his mind a moment before to address Miss Liston by her baptismal name.

"When do you think I may allow myself to call you Lydia?" he asked.

"When I am sure that I shall be your wife."

"Will you be my wife?" Blase said, bending forward and speaking low.

She looked at him earnestly, but without speaking.

"Say yes, and that little word makes me the happiest of men," said Blase.

"That little word may make us both for the rest of our lives happy—or wretched."

"Who could be unhappy with you?"

"Any one that I hated," cried she quickly, with a flash from her eyes that gave significance to her words.

"But you don't hate me?"

"No, but I should if you were my husband and I found that you were not the very best man in all the world; and that is what every man must seem to his wife if she love him, I think. I am sure I could not be indifferent. I must either

hate or love my husband with all my heart. It seems reasonable, does it not, that a woman who confides herself and all she has to a man should first be sure that he is quite good, and that she is not foolishly sacrificing the happiness of her whole life? It is not so serious a matter to a man, perhaps, because, if he finds that he has made a mistake in choosing a companion, he can get another. A woman can't. And so, you see," she said, smiling, "I don't find it quite so easy as you do to settle this question of marriage."

"How strange you are!" said Blase, regarding her with mingled wonder and admiration.

"Strange! I am sorry for that. I do not wish to be odd. I should like to be like other girls. How am I strange?"

"Strange in having by turns the simplicity of an ingenuous child, at others the wisdom of a thoughtful woman."

"Is that the only respect in which I am strange?"

"In that alone, except that just now I think you strangely beautiful."

"I don't mind that," she laughed. "I think I can account for my being sometimes childish, sometimes womanly. I am no longer a grub, and I'm not yet a moth, but I am just a little of both."

Blase smiled, then grew grave and thoughtful, saying nothing. The kitten scrambled up into Lydia's lap again, and, tired with playing, turned its paws in and purred drowsily under the gentle caress of Lydia's finger.

"Do you think there is any man good enough to be your husband?" Blase asked presently in a despondent tone.

"I hope so. I have no wish to be an old maid, I assure you."

"I know a good many men, but there's not one that I should like to see your husband."

"I think I can understand how that is," she said, laughing again.

"Candidly, I don't know one man who has not some fault."

"I don't think we can see anything to reverence in that little dumpy pagod on the chimney-piece;" said Lydia, "but the heathens who worshipped it, perhaps, saw no imperfections in it; and women are heathens in their husband-worship."

"I am afraid my imperfections are too glaring to be overlooked."

"I am sorry for that," she said seriously.

"Are you sorry? Why?" he asked eagerly.

Lydia hesitated a moment. It would not do to tell him why that admission made her heart sink.

"Because I shall have to begin my search all over again," she said.

"That is not your only reason," he said earnestly.

"It is one reason, and a very good one. Indeed, I would not marry you if I could not excuse your faults; and, as I told you, I do not intend to die an old maid."

"Do you know any of my faults?"

"Not yet. Mr. Tickel left them out of the inventory. He gave me a very full account of your virtues, of which, in truth, you seemed to have the exclusive enjoyment, for every other pretty gentleman whose character came in question had nothing but the vices."

"Tickel's an old f— I beg your pardon, Miss Liston."

Lydia enjoyed that slip immensely. The views of Blase in this respect, perhaps, coincided with hers.

"Will you supply the deficiency of Mr. Tickel?" she asked. "Will you tell me of your imperfections?"

"It requires little inquiry to find my faults. I have been wild and extravagant;

I have lost money at play; I have been profligate and wasteful; I have neglected the best friends I had, and shown disregard where gratitude was most due."

"These faults are of the past. Mr. Tickel hinted at them, and he did so because they made your repentance a radiant virtue. The prodigal son was dearer to his father than those who never left his roof. Captain Davenant, whom you had neglected, forgave you and loves you now."

"Oh yes, dear old man!"

"Then should not I forgive you, who have not suffered by your fault? 'Tis of the present and the future I have to think."

"Oh, for the present I live soberly enough, and for the future I can do no wrong if I have your happiness to think of."

"Why, you are even better by your own showing than by Mr. Tickel's," said Lydia, smiling, yet with a tender kindness in her

eyes that showed how willing she was to believe the best.

"The fact is, a man never sees his own faults," said Blase.

"Then you must leave me to find them out."

"Be merciful to me, a sinner," said he imploringly.

She did not answer him in words; but her eyes looking into his, said: "Do I not love you?"

CHAPTER VI.

BLASE FINDS THORNS IN THE PRIMROSE PATH.

If at that very moment Mrs. Romsey had not entered the room and made it impossible, Blase would probably have told Lydia about his pecuniary difficulties, and the purpose with which he had first come to her, trusting to her love to forgive him even that.

"Would to heaven she knew all," he said to himself, on his way home. "She has enough strength to resist the influence of Mrs. Romsey; I believe she loves me, and would not let a merely pecuniary difference separate us. I will certainly tell her the very next time we are alone."

This decision he communicated to Mr. Tickel in the evening.

"And how about the unpaid bills?" asked the parson.

"Curse the unpaid bills," cried Blase, his rage rising at the thought of them.

"And curse the unpaid bills say I, with all my heart," retorted Mr. Tickel. "But curses won't pay 'em, or you had been free of debt long ago. Look at the position calmly, and measure the result of carrying out your notion. If I know anything of Miss Liston's character, she will insist upon knowing your real position the moment you tell her it is not what she and Mrs. Romsey have chosen to imagine it."

"Very well, I shall tell her that I have nothing—that I have squandered my fortune, and can expect no help from my father."

"And thereupon you think she will consent to be your wife? I don't. I believe

that young lady has too much pride to take a husband who must come to her for every penny he wants."

"And d— it, sir, I have too much pride to take a wife on those conditions," cried Blase, banging his fist on the table.

"What, then, do you propose doing?" cried Mr. Tickel quickly.

"I shall ask her to wait until I have found some means of earning a living."

"That will be asking a good deal, considering your poor chances."

"You will allow that I have intelligence and a pair of hands."

"And a pretty pile of unpaid bills upon 'em. Don't kick the furniture about like that, Blase; it will only make the matter worse when the settling day comes."

"Why must you keep talking about the confounded bills?"

"Because it is the very thing that we must talk about. You will have to confess

that you are in debt to Miss Liston, if you carry out your idea."

"Well?"

"And when she finds that you have been spending money upon her amusement instead of paying your bills with it, I am much mistaken if she does not insist upon your taking from her purse every penny she has cost you at the expense of the shopkeepers."

"By the Lord, that shall not be!"

"How will you avoid it?"

"I will conceal my debts."

"Actually employing deceit in an absurd attempt to be candid. The girl will despise you for attempting to win her sympathy so cheaply."

"This is good, parson; your argument shows me that I do wrong to think of marriage."

"Listen patiently, and I will convince you that you must marry. You talked of

earning money. I warn you, Blase, that unless these sneaking tradespeople hear you are about to marry a fortune, they will lodge you in the Fleet before you can earn a single sixpence. And who is to get you out of prison? Not your father, certainly. You can only hope that your grandfather, Captain Davenant, will cut down a row of old oaks to pay your debts."

"Never!" cried Blase.

"How can you prevent him saving his name from disgrace, except by marrying Miss Liston?"

Mr. Tickel took out his snuff-box and indulged in a copious pinch, giving Blaze time to digest the hard truth.

"The girl's not ill-looking," he said presently. "She's her own mistress, and is eager to jump into your arms. There's no mortal reason why you shouldn't whisk her off in a post-chaise before the end of the week, to the happiness of every one

concerned. A little tiff when she comes to see the bills is the worst to be expected; and she'll love you all the better when the cloud has blown over, and be proud to think she could help the man she loves. On the other hand, there is sorrow for Miss Liston, heart-breaking mortification for Captain Davenant, disgrace for yourself, and the bitter humiliation of seeing a less scrupulous and deserving man carry off the girl who wished to marry you. We will say not a word about poor old Tickel, and the disappointment which must shorten a life too faithfully spent in the service of an ungrateful young friend."

"I would to heaven old Tickel were the only person whose happiness I had to consider," said Blase, and with that he left the room, and presently the house. Soon after Mr. Tickel strolled out, and spent a very pleasant evening with some sociable friends whom he found at Welsh's. Blase spent

some miserable hours in walking about the streets and striving to find some loophole of escape from his difficulties.

They met in the breakfast-room the next morning.

Hutchins brought in a pile of letters with the chocolate.

"Give them to Mr. Tickel," said Blase, as the man took them from the tray.

Mr. Tickel received them with a nod, and tucked them under one end of the dish of beefsteak that the gravy might drain down to the other end, and there they remained until the parson's appetite was appeased. Blase did not complain of this treatment of his letters; it was the only useful purpose they were likely to serve if they resembled the usual budget of dunning requests.

Slowly picking his teeth, Mr. Tickel passed the letters in review, determining their contents by the superscriptions.

"I know 'em all, Blase, butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers, every one except this." The parson handed a letter across the table.

"Captain Davenant's hand," said Blase, breaking the seal. "Begad, the old gentleman is coming up to town," he added, reading the letter; "'I find by my newspaper,'" he writes, "'that General Sir Philip Armytage is now lying at his house in Park Lane, London. If this be, as I believe, the Philip Armytage who served as lieutenant with me in America, I feel sure that he will do all that lies in his power to hasten your preferment at my request. I cannot tell you how overjoyed I am with the hope of terminating your anxious suspense. That no time may be lost I shall set out for London to-morrow morning, God willing; and if the roads be passable, I shall arrive at my destination some time on Saturday.'"

"Ah!" grunted the parson. Not a pennyworth of good can he do. That sweet old Duke of York wouldn't interfere with his mistress's business for all the generals in the British army.

"You will not let Captain Davenant know that," said Blase.

"Not I. Did ever you know me willingly to give pain to any one?"

Blase read the continuation of the letter to himself.

"My dear Gertrude, who enjoys with me the blessing of good health, is deeply concerned for your welfare," the letter ran; "not a day—I might almost say not an hour—passes, but some act, or look, or word reveals that you are in her thoughts. I cannot deprive her of the opportunity which now offers of seeing you once more before you are called to join your regiment. I shall bring her with me, as also her little maid, upon whom the solitude of a country

life has seemed to weigh heavily since her father's departure."

"What on earth is to be done?" cried Blase in desperation when he came to this passage. "Why do you sit there like a log, Tickel; can't you suggest something?"

"I'm ready to lay down my life for you, as I have been any time these ten years. Only let me know where your difficulty is, and I'll help you, I warrant."

"The difficulty is clear enough. Here am I forced to accept a part that I have no ability to play."

"From that I conclude that you have given up the notion you had last night of revealing your situation to Miss Liston."

"I settled that last night," said Blase with a groan. "It would break my grandfather's heart to hear I was in prison; and I love that girl too well to lose her, and not

well enough to sacrifice my own happiness for hers—God pardon me. I must marry her—if she will have me—and trust to her goodness of heart for forgiveness of my treachery."

"And believe me you will not trust in vain. What! will not a young girl forgive a pretty fellow for setting aside a few paltry scruples to win her? She must love you all the better for the sacrifice you make. Pshaw! the only thing she would not forgive would be your setting her aside for your scruples. I congratulate you, Blase, on your choice. You've done the brave thing."

"Don't talk of bravery; I feel like a cur that knows he merits a whipping."

"Tush! Let's have no more of that, but give our minds to something deserving of more serious thought. Now then, my young friend, about Captain Davenant."

"He is coming here; and how am I to

keep my debts secret with duns hammering at the door half the day?

"Take the captain out betimes, and leave the duns to me."

"Miss Davenant is coming also."

"And a dear, sweet, simple lady she is. You need have no fear on her account. I'll be bound she doesn't know what a creditor is. But you can take her out too. You will introduce both to Mrs. Romsey, who will find food enough for their minds to stave off their cravings to know your private concerns. Gad! my young friend, when you come to think of it, nothing could be more propitious for your fortunes than this visit. The love of two such estimable people will convince our friends in Piccadilly of your worth if they have any doubts. Why, we could wish for nothing better!"

The parson rubbed his hands gleefully, but still Blase looked rueful.

"That little girl's coming, also," he said with awkward hesitation.

"What little girl?" asked Mr. Tickel in blank astonishment.

"Miss Davenant's maid — Hutchins' daughter—you know."

Mr. Tickel looked askant at Blase, who was diligently scraping up a heap of crumbs on the table cloth with a knife.

"And a nice little body she is too," he said. "Rather prone to hanging about that corridor and staircase, hey? As neat a foot, and as pretty a pair of black eyes as ever I saw. Hum! There's nothing," the parson sniffed significantly, "nothing to fear from her Blase? she will do you no harm, hey?"

"Harm! She would do me none, poor little soul. The only thing I have to fear is that—that, from a few words in this letter I am led to believe that she likes me a little too well."

"Oh!" Mr. Tickel spoke with care not to hurt Blase's sensibilities. "You liked each other a little before you left Redwater."

"Yes. Captain Davenant tells me she has seemed low spirited ever since. The bother of it is, that she must be in the house here with Miss Davenant."

"Well, my young friend, you ought to know more about this sort of thing than I do; but be careful, Blase, be careful. 'Tis a risky business drinking from two glasses at one time. You should make the little rogue understand that 'tis all over with her the moment the affair ceases to be secret."

"What do you mean?" asked Blase sternly.

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" answered the parson hurriedly, frightened by the look and tone of Blase.

"You don't suppose I shall make a fool

of myself again with this girl. You don't imagine that I am base enough to make love to her and Miss Liston at the same time?"

"Of *course* I don't," cried Mr. Tickel, with more emphasis than sincerity.

"What I fear is, that this poor child, when she hears that I am in love with some one else, will be unhappy, and perhaps make a scene and—and that sort of thing."

"Just so—tell Miss Liston. That's what these jealous stupid young hussies do the first thing—tell their rivals and upset the whole apple cart."

"She wouldn't do that. But she may be unable to resist crying, and then she will be questioned by Miss Davenant and her father, and how is she to account for her tears?"

"I can tell you, Blase. If the girl likes you well enough to screen you, let her lay

everything to poor old Tickel. I won't deny it; for by George I shouldn't mind if it were the truth. But to admit the honest fact, the only time I chucked her under the chin she had the sauciness to say that if I did it again she'd tell my master. 'I'll tell your master,' those were her words, and she meant you. An impudent young baggage. But I like 'em impudent: don't you, Blase?"

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN DAVENANT AND HIS DAUGHTER COME TO TOWN.

Mrs. Romsey was enchanted to hear that Captain Davenant and his daughter were coming to London.

"Naturally I am very anxious to see Mr. Godwin's relatives," said she to Mr. Tickel in one of those confidential conversations which was the fit accompaniment to a dish of tea taken in the gloaming. "For although Lydia is self-willed and capricious to a distressing degree, and will tell me nothing definitely respecting her feelings or intentions, I perceive pretty plainly that her heart is already engaged to Mr. Godwin, and for that reason I look for-

ward with delight to a closer acquaintance with Captain and Miss Davenant; not because I have any doubt of their being fully as amiable, as genteel, and honourable as you have represented, for my agent confirmed all that you said in their favour; but because it may remove that feeling of indecision which possesses Lydia at the present moment, and to my great surprise; for I assure you when I was her age I had only to see a young man to know whether I could love him or hate him for ever. But then we are not all alike, and I may say, without vanity, that my judgment was from childhood always remarkably clear; and this makes me greatly troubled when I think of her future, for I am perfectly certain Mr. Godwin is not a man to be coquetted with; there's a decision and firmness about his character that I remarked the very moment I first saw him, and he's just as likely as not to

take offence at Lydia's perversity; and she might search the world over and never find so good a husband as he would be, as I have told her frequently; and I assure you the very thought of an estrangement taking place troubles my mind to the last degree. Do you think asparagus is to be had now?"

"I saw a truss in the florist's this very day, and a pretty penny they will ask for it, I warrant."

"That does not matter when hospitality is in question, for of course Captain Davenant and his daughter must be made to dine with us on Sunday, and I love asparagus above everything. Is white sauce considered genteel in London, Mr. Tickel?"

On the other side of the room Blase was watching Lydia's pretty fingers swiftly moving at her tambour frame. Neither he nor she had spoken for some minutes.

"Tell me about Miss Davenant," said Lydia, without raising her eyes from her work.

It was a pleasure to Blase to talk about Aunt Gertrude. He told of her wonderful love for him, of her sweet, patient, gentle nature, and her goodness; how in the old days she had welcomed him with joy, when he ran away from home to the shelter of Redwater; how she had wept over his early sorrows, and how, while her tears still flowed with sympathy, she counselled him to honour and obey his father to the utmost in his power, and bear with patience the treatment which seemed to him so harsh. All that he could remember he told, even to her giving him the purse containing, as he believed, her little marriage portion. Lydia did not say a word during the recital, and she remained silent when Blase ceased to speak.

"Perhaps she appears more beautiful to

my eyes than to others," said Blase, after a pause. "That should be so, since I, above all others, have cause to love her; yet I believe that you will like her when you come to know her."

"I have no doubt of that. Will she like me? that is the thought that makes me silent."

"Who that finds anything in me to like, can fail to love you?" murmured Blase with fervour.

Lydia expressed her appreciation of this compliment by a smile, but she said nothing. Her silence was unusual, for generally she made no secret of her thoughts. If she had spoken she would have said: "It is because Miss Davenant loves you, that I fear she will not like me," but that would have revealed more than she wished any one to know.

The forthcoming introduction gave her much more concern than one knowing her

fearless independence would have imagined. At night she locked her door and laid out every one of her dresses to find out if possible which would be most suitable to wear on Sunday. After looking at them with a critical eye from a distance, she picked out the plainest amongst them, and turned it about and about, regarding it with disparaging glances.

"I never did like it," she said to herself. "I should have cut it up for aprons long ago, if I hadn't been so lazy. 'Tis hideous, and that's the fact; but then those sweet, quiet old maids always do manage to find the ugliest dresses in the world. That violet is not quite so unpleasant," she dropped the brown one on the floor and took up the violet. "It's all right for sleeves and neck, but of all the ugly waists! The blue's better than that," the violet was thrown on the top of the brown, and the blue taken in hand—"but short sleeves

won't do. Yet they're pretty when one has fair arms, and I don't see what there is to shock good people in showing them: perhaps if all the bows were cut off it would look a little more serious, and then it wouldn't be very unbecoming. But oh! for a darling of a dress give me my white." Down went the blue and she approached the white with clasped hands. "He liked it. I forget what his words were; but I know they were nice. Something about Diana, or one of those people, I think. It fits me beautifully—but the sleeves are all wrong, and the neck is all wrong, and the bows are not made to take off, and it's too fashionable and too lovely by half."

The important question was not decided when she laid her head on the pillow and turned her attention to another subject of equal importance, contained in a duodecimo volume entitled "The Drawing-room Compendium, and Young Ladies' Mentor; a

complete Guide for Young Persons of the Fair Sex about to enter Polite Society, with Directions for Genteel Behaviour in various situations, serious and delicate." Having arranged her lamp, and well tucked the clothes under her chin, Lydia opened this important work and glanced at the index. There was such fascination in "Rules for deportment on receiving an offer of marriage from a young gentleman of pleasing exterior but questionable morals," that she turned to the chapter with that heading before grappling with the graver object of her studies. She read a column; once or twice her young shoulders shook with suppressed merriment, and finally the book dropped from her fingers and she burst into a peal of laughter. "Oh, what fun it would be to talk to Mr. Godwin like that," she thought. "How puzzled he would look, and what an affected little

piece of goods he would think me." She wasted no more time over this part of the book, but turned to the solemn chapter headed, "Rules for deportment on being introduced by a favoured suitor to his relatives." This was no laughing matter. "Dear me!" thought she, coming at length to the end of the speech set down for her use; "how shall I ever remember all this prodigious long sentence?" She turned with a firm resolution to master the difficulty, and read until the book once more slipped from her fingers, her eyes closed, her pretty lips parted, and sleep put an end for that night to her anxiety.

When Blase, with some ill-concealed confusion, told Captain Davenant on Saturday evening that he had ventured to accept a very pressing invitation for the morrow, given by a lady of his acquaintance who desired to be better acquainted with his family, the captain replied that he should

be glad to be introduced to any friends of his grandson, and thought very little more of the matter; but it was otherwise with Miss Davenant. Her woman's intelligence was quick to catch the signs of embarrassment in her nephew's face, and to divine their origin.

"What lady is this, dear?" she asked.

"A lady of Exeter, who is now staying in London with—with her niece. Miss Liston, the daughter of Admiral Liston, who fell in '94. The Listons of Monmouthshire.—Do you know the name, sir?" Blase asked, escaping from the inquiring eyes of Aunt Gertrude.

"I am trying to recollect. I think I remember some account of a captain of that name, who distinguished himself off Trincomalee in '82; if I am not mistaken, he was promoted soon after that gallant action."

"'Tis the same, sir."

"It will increase my pleasure in making the acquaintance of this lady to know she is the daughter of so brave a man," said the captain.

Miss Davenant noticed the flush of pride that rose in her nephew's face. "I hope the young lady was well provided for?" said she.

"She has a considerable fortune at her own disposal."

Miss Davenant heard this with a sigh of satisfaction. She said no more then, but when her father engaged Mr. Tickel in conversation upon the enthralling subject of transubstantiation — the captain, under the belief that it would be interesting to the parson and instructive to himself, invariably broached some abstruse subject of this kind, very much to the perplexity of Mr. Tickel, and not greatly to his own educational advantage—she said in a low voice:

"I feel quite interested in Miss Liston already. Is she pretty, dear?"

"She is lovely!" answered Blase, in a tone of fervour.

"I suppose she is quite surrounded by admirers?"

"Not one," said Blase, with much satisfaction in his voice and manner, "except myself."

Again Aunt Gertrude sighed and smiled. Perhaps after all her darling Blase would not have to risk his precious life in battle, if this young lady were really worthy to be his wife. That was a question that admitted of grave doubts, considering how splendid a fellow he was—in Aunt Gertrude's estimation; clearly Lydia had not overrated the necessity of being "very nice indeed," to obtain favour in the eyes of a critic so biased by affection.

Lydia had scarcely taken off her church-going dress on Sunday when a knock at

the street door told her the expected visitors were come. She opened her door and listened. First she heard the babble of Mrs. Romsey's swiftly flowing voice, then a low measured murmur which she concluded was Captain Davenant's, the full fat tones of Mr. Tickel succeeded, then the clear, incisive, manly utterance of Blase, and more babble from Mrs. Romsey's lips, after which a soft musical ripple that scarcely rose above the silence was identified by Lydia with Miss Davenant. "That is just the little voice I like," she said, as she closed the door and hurried back to her toilet.

The three gentlemen only were in the drawing-room when she descended, Miss Davenant having been carried off by Mrs. Romsey to remove her bonnet upstairs.

The captain had lost nothing of the gallantry which was fashionable in his

youth, and he rendered homage to Lydia's beauty and youth in an elaborate and well-rounded sentence, which reminded her at once of "The Drawing-room Compendium;" but this old-fashioned courtesy harmonized exactly with the dignity of his bearing, and the rich, though faded, costume which he wore. Just such distinguished and stately-looking old gentlemen, with just such courtly manners must wait upon royalty, Lydia conceived; and it did not displease this vain young person to be treated like a princess. She responded to his address with a natural grace and dignity that established her at once in the old gentleman's esteem as a young lady of good birth and breeding.

Then she rose and turned to face Miss Davenant, whom Mrs. Romsey ushered into the room. The simple little lady, who for many years had seen no prettier face than was shown in her own glass, was

for a moment fairly dazzled by the girl's bewitching beauty. To her natural charms her dress gave extra grace, especially in a woman's eye; for Lydia, after all, had put on her lovely white dress, despite the short sleeves and low neck, very wisely resolving to have nothing to do with "The Young Ladies' Mentor" or any other artifice, but to present herself in her natural character and be judged by her inherent merits.

Lydia caught in a moment the look of admiration in Miss Davenant's face, and smiled very sweetly in acknowledgment. That smile made her look more charming and lovable than ever.

"She is amiable and good!" said the impulsive little lady to herself, carried away as every one else is by the charm of physical beauty; and therewith, instead of making a formal courtesy, she stepped forward quickly and held out her two

hands, very much to the astonishment of her father.

If Aunt Gertrude was impulsive, Lydia was so likewise; and so, not content with taking Miss Davenant's two hands in hers, she bent forward and kissed her new acquaintance. The significance of this warmth was perhaps only known to themselves.

After dinner, when they gathered round the fire in accordance with Mrs. Romsey's desire, Lydia got Miss Davenant on the bergere by her side, and this gave them a kind of seclusion which both ardently desired. Then Mr. Tickel, for fear Captain Davenant might reopen a theological conversation, broached the subject of Bonaparte's movements, demanding of Blase whether any later despatches had been published. And while the gentlemen were discussing this matter, and Mrs. Romsey was watching an opportunity to

turn the talk into a channel where her voice might be heard, Miss Davenant and Lydia, in low undertone, carried on a conversation apart.

"What a terrible thing war is," said Miss Davenant.

"Yet how grand. 'Tis like a tempest that one watches with awe and admiration," said Lydia.

"Can you watch a storm?"

"I cannot help watching. It is too sublime to be passed without notice."

"I shrink away, not because I am afraid of the lightning, but because every crash of thunder seems more terrible than the last, and my thoughts go out with the poor souls at sea who lie at the mercy of the waves. Does not that thought strike you, dear?"

"I don't think it does. I always think how the brave men must exult in making their boats obedient to their will, and

going steadily on despite all that the heavens can send against them. If I were a man I should be a sailor, as my father was."

"Ah, it is natural to you to be brave. You inherit courage from your father. I know not what excuse to make for my own cowardice, for my father also braved peril. Perhaps I may attribute my want of courage to want of youth."

"I don't believe you want courage. I don't believe that any woman is cowardly, really. She would stand between death and the one she loved as boldly as any man."

"Yes, but that is so different to the courage of a man, who can fight when there's nothing particular to fight for," Miss Davenant said gravely.

"They fight to protect us—at least they say they do."

Miss Davenant, on behalf of the thou-

sands of Austrian and French women at that moment mourning for the loss of their protectors, thought that such protection might well be dispensed with. But she knew that the reflection was heretical and unworthy.

"I suppose we ought to be glad," she said sadly, "when we hear that there is to be a war for our protection, though the women of our nation can be none the better off for it in the end; but somehow *I* am not. When I read in the *Gazette* of a regiment leaving England, I think of the mothers who have watched these men grow up from little babes, who have wept and smiled over them, treasured up their words, cared for them, and taken pride in their manly strength and promise, and I wonder if they shall ever again clasp those dear ones to their hearts."

Miss Davenant's eyes grew moist, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

"It makes one's heart ache to think of them; and they are not the only sufferers," said Lydia, wondering why this maiden lady should think more of the mothers than of the wives, whose loss must be even greater.

"'Tis true, dear; young hearts must break as well as old." She turned her eyes towards Blase, and for a few minutes listened in admiration as he eloquently and briefly settled the European question; then in yet lower tones she said to Lydia:

"If my father's object in coming to London fails, I hope my nephew will relinquish the intention of being a soldier, and serve his country in another way. If he were in Parliament I feel sure he would be able to overcome the difficulties which harass the nation; and what a source of pride and happiness that would be to all who love him!"

Lydia did not know much about politics,

and she knew nothing about Mr. Godwin's private troubles, so she saw nothing ridiculous in Aunt Gertrude's supposition that he would be able to manage the affairs of the nation to perfection. She thought it would be very nice to have a house in London while Parliament was sitting, and receive the felicitations of great people upon her husband's admirable statesmanship, and then at the close of the season to fly away to some peaceful rural solitude, and have him all to herself. And already, despite her abstract bravery, she felt her heart quake at the thought of Blase being sent away to be shot at. So she took Aunt Gertrude's hand, which happened to be lying near hers, and squeezed it for a reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH ALL GOES WELL FOR THE PRODIGAL.

In the evening Blase begged Lydia to play some music, a request with which she at once complied. Miss Davenant, who herself played the harpsichord very prettily, had never before heard a pianoforte, and she was charmed with the instrument, but still more with Miss Liston's exquisite performance of Mozart's requiem. "One must have very deep feeling to play with such tender pathos," she thought. Lydia proposed that they should sing, and having found a collection of hymns, she selected some of the best known of those simple, yet very beautiful compositions, and all

joined in singing them with great delight, even to the lethargic parson and Mrs. Romsey. To the latter it was always a great treat to hear her own voice; while Mr. Tickel and Blase were both astonished by their own ability, and highly satisfied with their addition to the general harmony, for perhaps there is nothing of which men are so generally vain as their own vocal powers.

Emboldened by his success, the parson volunteered to sing the bass in Haydn's "Creation" if any one would venture to support him in the other parts. Owing, however, to his d—d glasses, as he afterwards explained to Blase, his performance in the oratorio was a failure, but his deficiency was amply compensated by Lydia's charming rendering of "With Verdure clad," and the timidly sweet singing of Miss Davenant in the solo, "On Mighty Pens."

"Oh, dearest girl," said Miss Davenant, the tears of happiness springing in her

eyes as she bent down to kiss Lydia, and thank her for playing, "Oh, if we only lived quite close together, and could join our voices in happy song of Sunday evenings as we have to-night!"

The pleasure of this music reminded Blase that there was to be a performance of "Elijah" on the following Tuesday at the concert rooms in Hanover Square, and without a moment's hesitation he invited the company to be present at the performance which was to take place in the morning, and to dine afterwards with him at his house—a proposition which was gladly acceded to by every one but Mr. Tickel, who, standing in the background, thrust his hands in his pockets, and said not a word, but looked at Blase in dismay and pity.

"How the deuce you are going to do it *I* don't know," he said to Blase when they were alone. "We may manage the dinner, but for half a dozen seats and a couple of

coaches you must have ready money, and where shall you get that? You had best make some excuse and get out of the oratorio."

"Oh, bah!" cried Blase impatiently. "Hutchins shall pawn my watches if necessary."

And the watches were pawned accordingly on Monday.

Betimes on that day Captain Davenant with Blase set out for Park Lane; and Mr. Tickel conducted Miss Davenant to Piccadilly, where, in agreement with arrangements made the previous evening, Miss Liston and Mrs. Romsey were in readiness to walk into the City and look at the shops —a trivial amusement, which was as full of delight to Miss Davenant as to the most frivolous of her sex.

With little difficulty the house of Sir Philip Armytage was found; and on Captain Davenant giving his name, the

servant ushered the two gentlemen into a sitting-room, where shortly afterwards they were joined by a young gentleman who announced himself as General Armytage's secretary, and begged to know how he might be of service.

"I wish to see the General," said Captain Davenant.

"General Armytage is confined to his bed and forbidden to receive visitors, but any message you wish to send shall be delivered," replied the secretary.

Captain Davenant as briefly as possible explained the object of his visit, and the claim he believed he had upon Sir Philip's consideration. This statement the secretary carried forthwith to the general, and after an absence of five minutes he returned, and in very courteous terms said that although Sir Philip Armytage failed to remember Captain Davenant, he would do all that lay in his power, so soon as he should again be

about, to obtain Mr. Godwin's commission, and would write to Captain Davenant the moment he had any favourable news to convey.

This was as much as Blase expected, but Captain Davenant was greatly disappointed. He, however, did his best to conceal his feelings, and to buoy up his grandson's hopes. He expatiated on the excellent character of Sir Philip Armytage when a young man, and declared that those qualities, which could only have ripened and grown stronger by age and service, must recommend him to the consideration of the Commander-in-chief, and would certainly ensure the prompt fulfilment of his promise.

"'Tis but a question of a few weeks more or less," said he, "and I have no doubt that I shall receive a letter from my old companion in arms before the buds on these trees are expanded into leaves."

It greatly gratified the old gentleman to see no signs of disappointment or anxiety in Blase's face. The result of this application was, indeed, a relief to Blase, for if by any accident the general had been able to offer him a pair of colours on the spot, he, in debt and with no means to supplement his official pay, would have been greatly embarrassed to know what to do with them. He had made up his mind to marry Lydia, and wilfully blind to the penalty incurred by his deception, reckless as to the sacrifice he was making of his own self-respect, and concerned only with his present happiness, he saw nothing to regret.

Things seemed to be going right for him. Even his creditors had been quieter during the past few days than they had been for some time previous. He had anticipated a painful scene with Peggy, but in that he found himself agreeably in error. The girl had kept out of his way as much as pos-

sible, and except that she looked thin and pale, made no sign which could convey the flattering impression that she still thought of him.

Poor Peggy! She had well prepared herself for the pain she was to suffer. Every time she thought of him, from the moment Miss Davenant told her that she was to go to London, she had said to herself, "I must not cry. He must never know how I suffer, or even how I delight." And these words she repeated when her heart leaped as she first caught sight of his handsome figure where the coach was to stop, and again when her father told her that probably Mr. Godwin would shortly marry a beautiful and rich young lady, and again when she heard him carelessly humming in his closed chamber. *She* could not hum a tune or forget the past. She never once looked in his face: she dared not. If she passed him it was with a quick step, and

eyes fixed straight before her. She never lingered in his way now. If she watched his coming and going, it was from coignes where she knew he could not see her.

Miss Davenant liked to chat with the girl, and after the evening in Piccadilly, she told her what a charming lady was Miss Liston; and Peggy listened eagerly, not losing a single word, while jealousy ate her poor heart away. "What a fool I am to love him!" she said, when he ran down to breakfast the next morning, laughing because Hutchins had been unable to awake him without alarming the whole house. She, foolish child that she was, had not slept for thinking of him and beautiful Miss Liston. "It is madness to think of him: how can he care for me? Oh, what a fool I am." So she had said many a time before, but the conviction did not help her to forego her folly. She wished sometimes that she could die, and forget Blase, but

she never wished for the time to come when she could return to Redwater, and suffer less. In those wildly hopeful day-dreams which broke the dull monotony of her despair, she used to fancy herself Lydia's servant in the future, when Lydia should be Mrs. Godwin, serving her loyally and truly, yet loving Blase still; enduring still the agony of unrequited love, and right until the last concealing from all the world the passionate devotion and hopeless yearnings that fretted at her heart.

Knowing that her quick wit would speedily lead her to discover Mr. Godwin's true position, John Hutchins thought it advisable to tell her all he knew, and to warn her against making any allusion to it in her conversations with Miss Davenant. "Remember," said he, in conclusion, "that Mr. Godwin is our benefactor; but for him I might have been in prison, and you an outcast in the streets at the present mo-

ment; and we are bound in gratitude to consider his welfare above everything."

Peggy's eyes flashed and the colour rose in her pale cheeks. She did not fully comprehend the significance of her father's warning, but she was indignant to think that she could be suspected of doing anything inimical to Mr. Godwin's welfare. To her he was something far more than a benefactor, and joyfully she would have laid down her life for him. "I do consider his welfare above everything," she said.

The revelation of his pecuniary embarrassment opened up a new field of speculation to her, and gave a new turn to her dreams. Did Mr. Godwin love Miss Liston as for a few brief hours he had loved her? she wondered; or was he about to wed her merely to free himself from poverty and obviate the sacrifice which Captain Davenant must make to save him from disgrace and a prison? She grew giddy with the

wildest hopes and the wildest jealousy as she thought of this probability. It was in her power to prevent him sacrificing himself to a woman he did not love. A letter revealing the truth to Miss Liston would break off the match. But from the meanness of sending such a letter the girl recoiled. Then she understood what her father meant by his appeal to her sense of gratitude to consider above all things Mr. Godwin's welfare. But was it not for his welfare to prevent the marriage he contemplated? That entirely depended upon whether he loved Miss Liston. If she were good and sweet, and he truly loved her, there was nothing to hope for, but that they might marry and live happily. Then the girl dreamed that she was rich as rich could be, and that she had paid off all Mr. Godwin's debts, and secretly put him in possession of all she had, and that then, free to marry whom he would, he had sought

her out and taken her to his heart, only at last to learn that she had given him his freedom. She knew that such dreams were wild and absurd, but what did that matter? To be a little fool was her only happiness, and she alone suffered in waking to the reality.

Blase had good reason to think that things were going well for him, when the one with the greatest temptation to ruin his matrimonial project had only such merciful feelings towards him. But, as Mr. Tickel sagely observed: "We are more frequently tripped up by the cursed little pebbles that we never give a thought to, than overthrown by the rocks we dread."

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH ALL GOES ILL FOR THE PRODIGAL.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when Blase and his friends returned in a couple of hackney coaches—for the weather that day was execrable—from the concert in Hanover Square.

Although not a musician, Captain Davenant had given his most strenuous attention to the oratorio, and derived from it the most sublime emotion which a mind carefully trained to appreciate the expression of noble and lofty sentiments can experience; he could not have forgiven himself, he said, had he failed to appreciate the beauties of a performance which had won

for the composer the esteem and patronage of His Majesty King George. More tender emotions had filled the hearts of Lydia and Miss Davenant as they listened; indeed, the latter lady had felt more than once an overpowering sense of ineffable love which brought tears of joy and happiness to her eyes. Blase had found exquisite enjoyment in watching Lydia's rapt face, and Mr. Tickel and Mrs. Romsey, who towards the close of the performance had found it rather difficult to keep their eyes open and simulate an appearance of interest, were exceedingly delighted when it was all over. "'Tis just like a sermon," Mrs. Romsey declared, her thoughts turning with a feeling of devout gratitude to that which usually follows a sermon—dinner.

Therefore it was a very happy group that gathered by the doorstep of Mr. Godwin's house as Mr. Tickel applied himself to the knocker.

Hutchins opened the door; Mr. Tickel, offering his arm to Miss Davenant, led the way in.

"Will you be good enough to step into the dining-room, sir?" said Hutchins; "there's visitors for my master in the drawing-room."

Mr. Tickel moved towards the dining-room, which was on the ground floor, giving a blank look over his shoulder at Blase.

"Dining-room, nonsense!" cried Blase, catching sight of a confectioner carrying in a pile of plates. "The drawing-room if you please, Mr. Tickel: I have no friends whom it will be unpleasant——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Hutchins; "the visitors are not your friends. I believe they have called to see you on a matter of business."

"Business, indeed! what business have you to show them into the drawing-room?"

"Don't be vexed, dear," interposed Aunt Gertrude. "We ladies must go up to my room, and whilst we are removing our things you can discharge your affairs."

This arrangement the ladies proceeded to carry out without further delay.

"What excessively unpleasant-looking men!" said Mrs. Romsey in a low voice as they passed the drawing-room, into which curiosity had prompted her to cast an inquiring eye. "But then, to be sure, men of business generally are."

"No ceremony, my dear Blase," said the captain. "Your affairs must be attended to. I will sit in the dining-room while you go up to your visitors."

"There is no necessity for that, sir," said Blase, who by this time had divined the character of his unbidden guests; "Tickel manages my affairs. You and I will have a chat downstairs if you have no objection. Go up, parson, and get rid of them as quickly as possible."

"Right, Blase, right; and I shall take the liberty to give that Hutchins a bit of my mind!" cried Mr. Tickel wrathfully; and then turning to Captain Davenant, "What a plague these servants are, sir," he added.

Hutchins was conveniently waiting outside the door.

"Bums?" was all Mr. Tickel said in a low tone of expectant interrogation.

Hutchins nodded.

"Tipstaff, and a warrant. Couldn't keep 'em out, I suppose?" continued Mr. Tickel, ascending the stairs slowly and taking off his gloves.

"Daredn't make any fight for it, sir. 'Bliged to take 'em up in the drawing-room, 'cause I expected the confectioner every minute; and if he had got wind of 'em, what should we have done for dinner?"

"You did quite right: whose account is it?"

"Edgebone's, the butcher's. He came himself with the bailiff, and he's there now."

Mr. Tickel groaned. "There's no feeling in a butcher," said he. "Be handy when I ring the bell, Hutchins, my good man."

With a brisk step he entered the drawing room, and as he closed the door he turned to the men at the other end of the room, and cried in much astonishment—

"What! Edgebone — my old friend, Edgebone. How *do* you do, sir?"

The two bailiffs rose from their chairs, but the butcher sat doggedly still, and in reply to Mr. Tickel's hearty greeting replied:

"I want eighteen pounds three and sixpence, if you please!"

"What! only eighteen pounds; I thought it was eighty, I am sure. Are these your friends, Mr. Edgebone?"

"My p'tic'lar friends: they've come to see that I get what's due."

"You don't mean to tell me, my good sir, that you've given yourself the trouble of taking out a warrant for this twopenny ha'penny bill of yours?"

"I do. Show the gent your warrant, master bailiff, if he's in doubt."

"Tut, tut! What an unnecessary expense. If you had only called upon me in a friendly way you should have had your money without a question." He rang the bell.

"The last time I called here in a friendly way, that young man there"—pointing to Hutchins, who stood at the door—"promised to kick me head over heels in the kennel if I came again, and slammed the door in my face."

"Do you hear that, fellow?" cried Mr Tickel indignantly. "You will ask Mr. Edgebone's pardon, sirrah."

"Don't want no pardons," said the butcher; "give me my money, and we'll cry quits."

"Why, that's spoke like a generous honest man. Here, fellow, take this key, and fetch a green pocket-book out of my escritoire—but first of all fetch me a bottle of wine to drown all animosity—quick! There's nothing so contemptible as animosity; and neither you nor I, Mr. Edgebone, would be the comfortable man each is, if we harboured the feeling. Now, how many children have you, Mr. Edgebone?"

"Ten," responded the butcher, after considering whether the promise of payment justified this amicable advance on his part.

"Ten, hey! and Mrs. Edgebone still a fine woman. My heavens, what a healthy honest woman she looks; and as good as she looks, hey?"

"Yes, she's a good un."

"A heart as tender as your own steaks, I warrant. And what a bust! There's some shape in *her:* now, what do you think she'd weigh, Edgebone?"

"Nigh on five-and-twenty stun, carcase weight, and as sound as a roach;" the butcher smacked his thigh in worthy pride.

"Bless my soul! Well, Mr. Edgebone, I envy you, and that's the truth, upon my soul; but envy sha'n't prevent my drinking to your very good health, and to the increasing charms of your good lady. Fill up Hutchins, bumpers."

Hutchins, who had brought in the bottle and glasses, obeyed. "Glasses, too, for these good fellows," he added, "bailiffs though they be."

"We only doos our dooty," said the tipstaff apologetically.

"Your duty is not disgraceful," said

Mr. Tickel; and then looking at the bailiffs as if he had never seen the like before, he added, "though I had no idea that bailiffs could look such honest men.

The butcher and the bailiffs, with a respectful nod to Mr. Tickel, emptied their glasses at a gulp.

"Fill up again for Mr. Edgebone and me," said the parson; "we will finish this bottle together. You have daughters, I suppose?"

"Seven on 'em, and all take after their mother."

"You must introduce me to them, though, begad, if they're anything like Mrs. Edgebone, you'll do well to keep your eye on me. Here's to their good health."

The butcher grinned, emptied his glass, and smacked his lips approvingly.

"Another glass, Hutchins; the bottle is not empty yet. And how do sheep go now, hey, Edgebone?"

"Wus 'an ever, sir. Not an old yeo but what'll fetch her three-and-four to three-and-eight."

"Bless my soul! three-and-eight for yeos, hey? Fill up Hutchins. I'll warrant a kind Providence sticks a bit of fat to the bottom of the scale now and then, hey?"

The butcher burst into a loud guffaw at this intensely good joke, and laughed till the tears trickled down his cheeks, as he acknowledged that this accidental advantage occasionally was on his side. Then he swallowed his wine and smacked his lips again. Mr. Tickel thought the time was ripe for action.

"Well, now, Edgebone," said he, "as we've no further need for the services of these honest fellows you can send them about their business, and Hutchins shall go fetch the green purse, and we'll finish the business."

At this descent from pleasure to business Mr. Edgebone grew suddenly serious. Putting the glass carefully on the table, he shook his head, and said firmly—

"No; I won't send these honest fellows away, neither. Not till the business is finished. Not me. Oh no."

"What, sir!" cried Mr. Tickel with much indignation. "Do you suppose a gentleman will submit to a show of force? Do you suppose I will pay by compulsion?"

"If you don't pay by compulsion, I'm pretty certain you wouldn't pay any other way. I likes your civility, and I likes your wine, but I don't like 'em well enough to make a fool of myself. Oh no. One word's as good as a hundred; and I tell you plainly, sir, those honest fellows, as you call 'em, won't get my permission to leave this house until my bill's paid. So there!"

Indignant and persuasive by turns, Mr. Tickel used his eloquence to the utmost, but in vain. Mr. Edgebone became only the more stolid and firm by these efforts to move him. At length the parson descended to the dining-room, uncomfortably conscious that the enemy was too strong for him.

As he got to the foot of the stairs Blase came from the dining-room, pale with anxiety.

"Look here," said he angrily, in a low voice, "this must finish. The ladies have been upstairs half an hour."

"'Tis that plaguey Edgebone, the butcher. I have done my best, and he won't go without his eighteen pounds odd."

"What is to be done? We can't keep the ladies upstairs any longer. 'Tis shameful. And the dinner is ready to be served."

"The butcher must have his money. Have you anything to pawn?"

"Nothing; my trinkets went yesterday."

The confectioner's man approached.

"If you please, sir," said he, "cook says the fish is spoiling."

Blase replied with an angry gesture, and, stamping his foot, turned away.

"The dinner must be served," said the parson; "that turbot must *not* be spoilt. Go upstairs, Blase, and write the man a draft upon Hooker, of Lombard Street."

"I have no money there."

"No matter; write the draft; and while the butcher goes a wild-goose chasing let Hutchins go round to Welsh's, Blake's, Will's, White's, Brooke's—anywhere that it is possible he may find a friend who will lend you assistance until to-morrow. If he gets back before the butcher, all will be well."

"What chance is there of his getting the money?"

"The only one; and on that chance depends your honour and happiness. Don't lose a moment. As soon as you have written the draft and shoved the butcher out of the house, send up word to the ladies and order the dinner to be served. Think of that turbot! I will go in to the captain, and if he asks, Blase," he added, returning to Blase and speaking in a low voice, "I shall tell the old gentleman that the men upstairs are a deputation of the parishioners waiting upon you to stand for churchwarden, so be careful how you lie when you come down."

It was not until he had carried out these instructions, and was sitting at the head of the table with his guests, that Blase reflected on the consequences of this last desperate act of folly. Edgebone, the butcher, was out of the house, certainly, but the bailiffs remained in the drawing-room awaiting his return. And return

he would most assuredly, and the climax must ensue.

Enraged with the trick put upon him, the butcher would loudly proclaim that Blase had attempted to put a fraud upon him. And was it not a fraud that he had committed? Blase was uncertain. Even if the butcher could be kept out of the house, it was impossible for him to take his visitors up into the drawing-room. This fact was evidently obvious to Mr. Tickel by the manner in which he prolonged every course. But the dinner could not be protracted to an indefinite length; and what apology could he make for keeping his company in the dining-room until it was time for Mrs. Romsey and Lydia to go home? After that his grandfather must know all. Of the possibility that Hutchins would succeed in finding any one willing by the mere asking to send him pecuniary assistance he had

no hope whatever. Friends he had none, and his acquaintances he had latterly avoided.

Never had he felt so utterly ashamed and miserable. The dinner, thanks to Mr. Tickel's judicious arrangement, was excellent; Mr. Tickel was in the gayest spirits, Miss Davenant and Lydia were still under the charm of the music they had heard, and Captain Davenant had sufficient to occupy his attention in listening to Mrs. Romsey's never-failing discourse; but Blase failed to draw consolation from these facts. It seemed to him that every one must see his embarrassment, and be wondering what troubled him. He dared not look at Lydia; he could not look fixedly at any one. He drank more wine than was good for him, in the hope that it would give him courage: it only increased his nervousness. Then he began to listen for the bell or the

knocker to sound; and when at length his ear caught the ringing of the street bell, his hand shook so that he had to set down the glass he had taken in his hand.

The waiter came to his side and whispered that a gentleman wished to see him.

"Mr. Tickel, I must trouble you," said Blase.

The parson, apologising, rose from the table and left the room.

With a desperate effort Blase said something intended to be facetious. The joke fell flat. No one saw the point of it, and he felt that he was a fool and an idiot.

Mr. Tickel shortly returned, whispered to Blase, and then said, in suave and amiable tones:

"I feel sure that no apology is needed for your leaving the table. When I tell you," he added, looking round the table, "that an old friend, lately fallen into distress, claims Mr. Godwin's services, you

will permit him to withdraw for a few minutes."

Blase mumbled a few unintelligible words of apology in addition, and escaped from the room.

In the hall he found Mr. Phillips.

"Thorry to intrude, my dear thir," said that gentleman; "but I happened to hear that you have bailiffth in the houthe, and I thought you might like a little athithtanth."

"Have you twenty pounds with you?" asked Blase.

"Twithe twenty, my dear thir."

"Then, for God's sake, let me have it."

"With all my heart. You've only to write a little bit of paper and the money shall be yourth."

"Follow me," said Blase in desperation, and he ran upstairs to the drawing-room, and caught up a pen.

"Hereth a bit of paper written all ready

for you," said Mr. Phillips, taking out a folded sheet from his note-book. "Only got to fill in your name."

Blase took the paper, sat down at the table, and dipped his pen in the ink.

Another ring at the bell reached his ear.

"Mithter Edgebone, the butcher;" remarked Phillips, "we're jutht in time for him."

The pen was dry. With a curse Blase threw it away, and looked for another.

"Hereth a nithe pen—alwayth carry one with me," said Mr. Phillips, producing a short quill.

Blase wrote his name, and took up the pouncet-box. Mr. Phillips set a roll of guineas on the table. As Blase was scattering the powder over the wet ink the door opened, and Hutchins entered, breathing quickly with the haste he had made.

"Here's the money, sir," he cried eagerly, setting down a purse before Blase.

Mr. Phillips had his fingers on one edge of the paper. Blase looked at the purse for a moment incredulously, then, snatching the paper away, he cried:

"Heaven be praised! I have no need of your money, Mr. Phillips;" and with that he crumpled up the paper and threw it on the blazing fire.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEPARTURE OF CAPTAIN DAVENANT.

The little party broke up late at night, for with the departure of the bailiffs and Mr. Phillips went every compunctious sentiment from Blase's excited mind. He was exuberantly gay in the drawing-room, which was rid of the unbidden guests who had troubled his peace; and his gaiety was participated by those about him. It never once crossed his mind to ask of Hutchins how and from whom he had obtained the purse, or to consider that the loan must be paid off. It was only when he was alone with Mr. Tickel, after Captain and Miss Davenant were gone to bed, that these thoughts were presented to him.

"Where on earth did Hutchins get the money?" asked Mr. Tickel.

"I have not the slightest idea. Ring the bell, parson, and we will inquire."

He drew out the purse and counted what was left in it. In notes and gold there was over sixty pounds.

"What is the name of the gentleman who sent me this purse?" he asked, when Hutchins responded to the bell.

"I have no notion, sir."

"You surely know who gave it to you?"

"A gentleman I have never seen before. 'Twas in this way, sir. I had been to White's and Brooke's without finding any gentleman of your acquaintance; but at Will's I found my Lord Brompton, with young Mr. Bannister, the actor, and two or three other gentlemen, sitting over a bottle. I begged the favour of a word in private with my lord, and told him of

your necessity, begging the loan of twenty pounds for a few days. 'Upon my soul, that's as cool as any demand of yours Jack,' cries my lord, turning to the table; and then he told them what I had asked. 'He's a man after my own heart,' says Mr. Bannister; 'what's his name?' 'Blase Godwin,' says my lord, 'the son of a country baronet; a would-be buck, who, having spent all his money with a reprobate old parson——'"

"There's no need to repeat all these details," said Mr. Tickel. "My lord was in liquor, doubtless."

"I shouldn't repeat this, sir, but for what it led to," said Hutchins.

"Go on," said Blase; "finish."

"My lord bent over the table and spoke low, so that I couldn't catch what he said," continued Hutchins; "but as he finished a young gentleman of the company jumped up, and says he to Lord Brompton, 'You

are in error sir: Mr. Godwin is incapable of the conduct you impute to him.' 'What do you mean by that?' cries my lord. 'Do you say I lie?' 'I say,' says the young gentleman, 'that Mr. Godwin had good reason to discontinue playing with you.' 'Do you imply that I didn't play the cards fair?' asks my lord. 'If Mr. Godwin's losses were greater than he could support he was fully justified in desisting from play. For the rest,' says the young gentleman, taking out his pocket-book, 'I assert that Mr. Godwin is incapable of a mean or ungenerous action, and in support of his honour you will find me ready at any moment to give any individual proof you may require.' With that he lays a card on the table before Lord Brompton, and, bidding me follow him, left the house. In the street he called a hackney coach, and, getting in, bade me take the seat beside the driver

and instruct him where to go. 'Is your master alone?' he asks, when we stopped outside the house here. 'No sir,' says I. 'He has company to dinner which makes him doubly anxious to get rid of the bailiffs upstairs.' 'Then,' says he, 'I will not trouble him with a visit to-day. Beg him to accept this purse from one who has no greater desire than to be of service to him.' And with that he stepped into the coach, spoke a word to the coachman, and was driven away as the door opened to me.'"

"And at the last you did not recognize him as anyone you have seen here?"

"Not with certainty, sir. I seemed to know his face, yet I couldn't for the life of me say where I had seen him. I have a bad memory for faces. But I should know his again if I saw it."

"As I pray devoutly you may not," said Mr. Tickel.

"That will do. You may go to bed, Hutchins," said Blase gloomily.

"What's amiss, Blase?" asked the parson. "There's nothing now to make you look glum."

"Nothing—except a sense of humiliation that you cannot understand."

The descent was not easy for Blase. Every step brought him into greater difficulties, and in the midst of his troubles he had not even the satisfaction of knowing that he was going in the right direction. It seemed to him particularly hard that with the strongest desire to be worthy of Lydia's love he should be forced by unavoidable contingencies to strip away the manly virtues which were his best claim to her affection.

After lunch on the following day Blase conducted Miss Davenant to Piccadilly, where she had promised to spend the afternoon which was to be her last in

London; and this gave her the opportunity for which she had dearly longed of having some private conversation with him.

"You cannot tell how delighted I am that you have such agreeable friends in this great town, where the absence of flowers and trees must make the heart desire human companionship," she began.

"Why, you have seen but two of my friends," said Blase, with a smile.

"And is not that enough, dear? Is it not better to centre one's affection upon two or even one friend than to divide it among many?"

"Indeed, I think so."

"And Miss Liston is so charming——"

"Isn't she!" said Blase in a tender tone, turning his eyes to Aunt Gertrude.

"She is so sensible and yet so sweet, so bright and so good."

"And so beautiful."

"I suppose I should have mentioned

that first," said Miss Davenant, smiling: then, with that abruptness which makes so apparent the artifice of people to whom artifice is not habitual, she went on with assumed distress oddly at variance with the smile that had the moment before lit up her face, "Do you know, dear, I am afraid General Armytage will not be able to get your commission. I feel sure papa's confidence in him is only assumed. What *will* you do?"

"Ah, what shall I do?" Blase spoke with mock solemnity. Aunt Gertrude looking up into his face found such an odd twinkle in his eyes that she could not but laugh though she did her best to look serious.

"'Tis wrong to jest about this, Blase dear," said she. "I am sure papa is sadly disappointed. And I think 'tis that which makes him anxious to get home again."

"I wish it were otherwise, and that you could stay longer."

"So do I, for my own sake and yours; there must be so many occasions when I could be of service to you." Not seeing her way to follow up this observation at the present moment, Aunt Gertrude, after a little pause, continued: "I suppose, dear, you are beginning to think of some other career, now that it is almost certain you cannot be a soldier. Miss Liston agreed with me, in speaking on this subject, that it would be a great and good thing if you went into parliament."

Blase heard this with such evident satisfaction that Miss Davenant was emboldened to come to the point without further delay.

"Do you intend to make Miss Liston your wife?" she asked.

"Well, you see, the question is, will she be my wife?"

"I think she will say yes," said Miss Davenant, with a sigh of relief; "I feel sure that she loves you."

"Do you?" said Blase, in a tone which clearly asked for further information upon the subject. Miss Davenant with much pleasure described the observations she had made which had led to this conclusion, and did not blush for her treachery in disclosing all that Lydia had said in their confidential conversation. It surprised her to find that despite the eager pleasure with which Blase listened, his face grew grave at the conclusion.

"She would like anyone who made himself commonly agreeable," he said; "but it is not sufficient that I should love her and she should like me. She has clear sense and deep feeling, although she is so young and inexperienced; and the man she will marry she must love and trust with her whole heart, feeling sure that

she can love no one better. And how can she feel so towards me, knowing that all she knows is merely superficial?"

Aunt Gertrude did not dare to dispute the conclusions of her admired Blase, although she felt that a girl's decisions were generally influenced by her heart rather than by her head.

"She knows your past history, doesn't she, dear?" she asked timidly.

"In a partial sort of way. Tickel gave his version of it to Mrs. Romsey; but you may be sure that was one-sided."

"Of course it was. A man cannot see the fine points of character that a woman perceives. That is why I wished, for your sake, that I could stay in London and give Miss Liston a truer notion of your character."

Blase laughed at Aunt Gertrude's misconception, and at the idea of her speaking of him impartially.

"I think," said he, "that Miss Liston's wits are quick enough to find out, despite your praises, that there are many better fellows in the world than I am."

"She *couldn't!*" cried the little lady emphatically. "And you shall prove that there is no better man than you when the chance comes for you to show your courage and the nobility of your nature."

Blase said nothing in reply. He was thinking what this fond proud soul must suffer when the truth became known.

"Of course nothing should be concealed from Miss Liston," said Miss Davenant, after some minutes of reflection; "I mean concerning your family relations," she added, as Blase turned his eyes towards her with quick suspicion.

"Yes, yes, dear," he said. "Certain events relative to my poor mother, and to my last visit to the Moat are unkown to her. That is a subject upon which I

could not speak freely to a young lady, still Miss Liston should know."

"She shall know, if I can find means to be alone with her; and I dare say, my dear, that papa will talk to you upon this subject in the course of the day, for I thought it right to tell him what was in my mind when we were together this morning."

And Captain Davenant did speak to Blase in the afternoon when he returned from the British Museum, whither he had begged Mr. Tickel to accompany him in the hope of profiting by his learning.

"My dear boy," he said, "Gertrude tells me that she has reason to know that your feeling towards Miss Liston is warmer than that of mere friendship; is it so?"

"Indeed it is, sir; I love Miss Liston with all my heart."

"I am very glad to hear it, and I congratulate you upon your choice. I do not know that I have ever seen a young lady

more graceful in manner, more charming in personal appearance, or better suited by birth and education, to be the wife of my grandson; and it would therefore give me great pleasure to render any service in your behalf, which honour, or etiquette —to use a new but explicit word—demands." The old captain, speaking with some constraint, continued: "In my time it was customary for the near relative of a suitor to demand a lady's hand for him; but the habits of polite society have so altered in the last thirty years that this formality may be no longer necessary; nevertheless there are events intimately connected with your history, which, painful as it may be to disclose them, and much as I desire to avoid their revelation, should be known by Miss Liston before she is asked to take your name."

Blase, who had been listening with his eyes upon the floor, looked up at his

grandfather, wondering if there was any revelation to make of which he was ignorant. The set expression upon Captain Davenant's face showed him that the subject was distasteful to him, and that he approached it only from a sense of duty.

"'Twould be premature, I think, sir," said Blase, "to mention the affair at present."

"That is my opinion also," Captain Davenant said in a tone of relief, "for how can you ask the young lady to be your wife whilst it is still uncertain that you will be able to marry her? 'Tis too early to despair of obtaining your commission, and you cannot choose a second career until the first is definitely abandoned."

Blase must have looked very wretched at this moment, for the captain's voice dropped to a tone of tender sympathy as, laying his hand on his grandson's arm, he said:

"I know how wearying this delay is to you; it would be to any young man of spirit. I have seen in your face more than once in the last few days signs of care and anxiety, which are fully explained by the hopes held out by love and ambition that can neither be relinquished nor encouraged. Such a condition of uncertainty is not to be borne with patience; it would be unreasonable to prolong it indefinitely. Come, let us be practical and put a period upon your endurance. We are half through February; if by the end of March the prospect of obtaining the colours are no better than at present, we will abandon the hope altogether. What do you say to that, my boy?"

"It is very reasonable," said Blase, gloomily; for every word and act of kindness made him feel his own unworthiness.

"I have it in my mind," said the captain cheerfully, "to beg the two ladies to

visit us in the spring. By the second week in April we may hope that the woods will be beautiful with primroses and anemones, and then would be a very proper time for you to make your declaration to Miss Liston."

"'Tis prodigious kind of you, sir."

"I have no greater pleasure than to lay out schemes for your welfare, my boy; the idea of your marrying has not escaped me, though I have concealed my thoughts on that subject from Gertrude, because naturally her hopes tend in that direction, and if she thought that I forwarded them she would raise a thousand objections to your being a soldier. 'Tis a hard matter at the best to make her admit that your honour is of more importance than your happiness, and in her heart she disbelieves what she is forced to profess. Of course you know what my feelings are in that respect, Blase."

There was something in his voice and manner that led Blase to doubt whether the old captain's feelings were entirely what he himself tried to believe they were. All his life he had made it his duty to like what was right, and often in good faith he professed to be following his inclinations, when in truth he was being guided by principle.

"To see you a soldier is my first wish," continued Captain Davenant; "for the noblest thing a man can do is to offer his life in the protection of his king and his country. But if I may not live to see you famous as a soldier, I may hope to see you in the enjoyment of domestic happiness. That is Gertrude's dream; and it has been mine also, when I have felt the winter evenings long, and the house has seemed unusually empty and silent. At these times, Blase, I have thought — always supposing that you did not obtain your

commission—what joy it would give me to see you the master of Redwater. At Christmas some village children came to the house singing carols; Gertrude had them in the house—you know her passion for children—and gave them cake and wine. They were only the children of common folks, but you have no idea, Blase, how sweet the young voices sounded in the old house; and since then more than once I have found myself longing to hear the pleasant sounds again. 'Tis a silly fancy, mayhap, but such voices are what the old house seems to want."

Blase murmured a few words of acquiescence, and then was silent, wondering what under current of thought ran through his grandfather's mind.

"And there are improvements to be made on the property," pursued the captain, "which I am too old to undertake, which require modern notions and youth-

ful energy for the proper carrying out. I can only keep it as it was, but you might make it what it should be. And 'tis high time these improvements were made. I walk over the house sometimes conscious that something is wanting, that there is need of something which I cannot supply. Nothing has altered in the last fifty years, and yet the rooms never before seemed to be so dull and cheerless. I was impelled to alter the regularity of the furniture one day, and, upon my honour, the effect of it having been recently used by visitors gave the room a more cheerful aspect. These senile fancies will make you laugh, my boy."

"Indeed, sir, they will not," replied Blase, who felt more inclined to cry at this picture of the old gentleman's solitude. "'Tis natural that people with loving hearts should find solitude intolerable."

"That is what has struck me in respect to

poor Gertrude, Blase. I have my resources —my coins, my books, and my affairs; but she has little to occupy her thoughts, and they must dwell almost continually upon the outer world. But she never murmurs. 'Tis in the nature of such women to bear their regrets and unsatisfied yearnings patiently. When the weather is fair she goes into the village and interests herself in the cares of the village folks; but between them and her there is only the bond of simple humanity. The tastes of these unlettered people are not hers; and then, again, women have such strong family feeling. It is necessary that there shall be some mingling of blood for their relations with other women to be perfect. They are not capable of friendship in the sense that we men understand it, at least so my observations lead me to suppose. And so, my boy, I have been thinking— though I beg you to say nothing of it

to Gertrude until it is absolutely certain that a military career is impossible of attainment—I have been thinking, that instead of holding the house at Redwater until I am called away by our Heavenly Master, I would put it in your possession on the day of your marriage, to the end that I might see with my living eyes the fulfilment of the visions I have seen in imagination."

"Oh, sir!" cried Blase, and he could say no more.

"'Tis my dearest wish—next, of course, to your taking arms—that I should see you in the possession of Redwater; a wish which I fear I have unduly encouraged considering the secondary importance in your welfare of that I desire. 'Tis part of that second childishness of which our great poet speaks, to think of one's own happiness before all other, and to turn to those about us for love in our helplessness. The old

house must be yours sooner or later; and if you are to lead a domestic life 'tis to my own interest that you should take it at your marriage, that for the few remaining years of my life my eyes may be blessed by the sight of happy faces, and my ears by the pleasant sound of young voices. And so if in the spring you make Miss Liston your wife, I hope you will gratify my desires, and make Redwater your home."

The response of Blase is not worth writing down, being made up of broken sentences and unintelligible words of gratitude.

In the evening the two gentlemen went to the little house in Piccadilly, where they found Miss Davenant and Lydia alone in the drawing-room. A severe headache, and other painful symptoms of a disordered digestion, which Mrs. Romsey attributed to a cold taken in the concert room, had compelled that good lady to go to bed

early in the morning, and there, at the entreaty of her niece, she had stayed all day, to the great secret satisfaction of Miss Davenant and Lydia also. Lydia was sitting before her tambour-frame, and when Blase, who pretended to take great interest in the progress of the work she was doing, drew his chair near to look at it, she said:

"I have been working all day; don't you think I have done a great deal?"

"That is clear."

"And the colours—do you like them?"

"They are perfect."

"You great goose! Why, I have done only that tiny piece, and 'tis all wrong!" she said, laughing, "and I wonder I have done so much," she added in a low voice, "considering how my heart and soul have been given to that dear little lady over there."

It seemed to Blase that there was more

tenderness in Lydia's eyes this evening than he was accustomed to find there.

As this was Captain Davenant's last visit, Mrs. Romsey, despite her indisposition, came down to say good-bye, and the captain then formally invited the two ladies to come to Redwater in the middle of April, and stay there as long as they found it agreeable.

Lydia accepted joyfully. "I begin to hunger for green fields," she said. Mrs. Romsey accepted also, only making the proviso that it should please heaven to spare her until that time, for like most robust people she regarded the slightest ailment of her own as the beginning of a fatal illness.

At nine o'clock the next morning Captain Davenant and his daughter, with her maid, took their places in the Exeter coach. Early as was the hour, Lydia was at the starting place with Blase and Mr.

Tickell, to bid her dear new friend farewell. Both were tearful, as affectionate friends must be on such occasions; but they did their best to look cheerful when the coach began to move, as indeed every one else did except the little maid who sat beside Aunt Gertrude; and as no one gave a look or a thought to her, why should she make a show of hiding her dejection? Her heart might break, but not a tear would fall in pity.

"In two months," said Aunt Gertrude, waving her hand; then all nodded in acquiescence, for each was thinking what might happen at the end of that time.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH BLASE DISCOVERS HIS BENEFACTOR.

"In two months," thought Blase, as he walked homewards after leaving Lydia at her house. "Shall I be able to keep up the deception so long?"

It seemed exceedingly doubtful.

"You'll have to finish the business before a couple of months, my young friend," Mr. Tickel had said to him the night before, when they returned from Piccadilly. "There was a pretty business in the house whilst you and Captain Davenant were chatting this afternoon. If there was one there was a dozen greasy tradesmen came, and every one with the

same cry of taking out a writ. They've heard how Edgebone got his money, and they'll take the same means of getting theirs. This is that Jew money-lender's work, and one of two things must be done: either you must accept the Jew's terms, or you must marry Miss Liston at once."

Two months! Two weeks, two days, two hours even, might not pass before he was haled off to the debtors' prison. "At this very moment," thought he, as he knocked at his door, "the bailiffs may be waiting within to lay their hands on me."

And it looked greatly as if this supposition was to be verified, to judge by the excitement in the face of Hutchins as he opened the door.

"A visitor to see you, sir, upstairs," said the man, speaking in a loud voice, but making gestures of caution at the same time.

"A constable?" asked Blase, in the firm voice of a man prepared for the worst.

"No, sir," Hutchins dropped his voice, "the gentleman who sent you the purse t'other day."

"He?"

"Him, sir. But he bade me say nothing of that to you."

Here was a new surprise. For what purpose had this unknown friend come if not to reclaim the money he had lent?

"Is Mr. Tickel with him?"

"No, sir. I have not seen Mr. Tickel since he left home with you."

Mr. Tickel had wisely excused himself on the plea of business when the coach had started, and left Blase alone with Lydia. He was now in a coffee-house.

Blase slowly ascended the stairs, not a little perplexed as to how he should meet his mysterious visitor. He opened the drawing-room door.

A gentleman was seated, with his back to the door, before the fire reading; his hat and cane lay on a chair near. As Blase closed the door the gentleman rose and faced him. Blase stopped in his advance, and stood as if petrified.

His visitor was Eugenius.

Blase recognized him instantly, though he had seen him but once since he had come to manhood, and then only for a few moments. But independent of the strong likeness existing between him and Father Dominick, the face of Eugenius was sufficiently remarkable to make an impression upon the mind of a merely casual observer. The meagre long jaws, the prominent chin, the straight cut mouth, the long hooked nose, which formed with his retreating forehead an almost unbroken curve, the deep-set eyes with their odd half-developed eyebrows, these were features which, under the shadow of a cowl, would have realized

one's idea of an ascetic monk, but which looked strangely at variance with a modern peruke and the habit of a gentleman about town.

Laying the book upon the table, he stepped forward and stood before Blase, with his hand extended, precisely as he had stood when they last met at Godwin's Moat. Blase wished with all his heart that he could treat him now as he had treated him then, for his first feeling was of strong aversion to the son of the man to whom he attributed his father's ruin and his own. But both reason and gratitude called upon him to overcome his unjust, though natural prejudice. For a moment he stood irresolute, his will swaying between the opposing forces of like and dislike, and then his generous feelings predominating he took the hand which Eugenius had kept extended, as he watched the varying expression in Blase's face.

"I will not attempt to conceal my knowledge of your generosity," said Blase. "I am aware that 'twas you who placed your purse at my disposal."

"That is evident," said Eugenius, in a phlegmatic tone. "You would not have given me your hand but for the sentiment of gratitude."

Blase was glad to get his hand away from the cold, tenacious fingers of his visitor. He knew not what to say. He would have been glad to pay off his debt and finish the interview at once, but that was impossible.

"Sit down," he said, approaching the fire.

With priestly humility Eugenius stood until Blase was seated, and then took a chair at some distance apart. With the same air of submission he waited for Blase to speak, which was embarrassing, since Blase was entirely at a loss for words.

"You have rendered me a great service," Blase said at length, in desperation. "But upon my life I don't know how I am at present to repay you."

"I trust you do not think that I came here with any mean hope, Mr. Godwin," said Eugenius, in a tone of remonstrance.

"No. That was a slip of the tongue that I beg you to pardon. The precautions you took to keep your service secret proves that you had no mercenary motive. And my fellow told me how you defended my name at Will's, that is sufficient to show that you are kindly disposed towards me. But the fact is, I do not know—that is, I shall be much obliged if you will tell me what motive you had in paying me this visit, Mr. ——"

"I call myself Mr. Eugenius," said the young man humbly, bowing his head as if to conceal his shame in having thus to own himself a bastard.

"Poor wretch," thought Blase, "'tis no fault of his that he is of such birth."

"My object in coming here, Mr. Godwin," continued Eugenius after a pause, "is twofold—to free myself from undeserved reproach, and to render you assistance. Will it trouble you to listen to an explanation of the cause from which these desires so separate from my material advantage sprang?"

"On the contrary, sir, I shall listen with much interest."

"From the time I became capable of understanding the brutal jokes and innuendoes of the villagers and the servants about the Moat, I have recognized the shame of my birth. My mother and Sir Gilbert have not been able to cheat me into the belief that I am their legitimate son—even though self-love and ambition made me eager to credit the assertion. I am a bastard, and I know it. My voice,

my face, my very finger nails," he stretched out his hands as he spoke, "proved me to be the son of Father Dominick. This knowledge crushed my pride, and made me shun all communication with the world outside my home. I felt that I was a branded impostor for all honest men and women to scorn. At times my soul rebelled against the cruel hardships I was forced to bear; I felt disposed to quit this home and seek to make my independence abroad. But my crushed spirit was not equal to the necessary effort of breaking the ties of affection which bound me to my affectionate mother and Father Dominick. I joined my father — for I acknowledge him, though he, for my mother's sake, refuses to acknowledge me —I joined him, Father Dominick, in studies, and books supplied the place of friends. With them I forgot to think of myself, and could blind my conscience to the

future. News was circulated freely at the Moat that you were a gamester, a spendthrift, I know not what; and it was prognosticated that soon you would come to your father for forgiveness and money. Then the hope came to me that if you had committed grave faults you would have compassion on me, suffering also for a fault. Sir Gilbert said he should give you part of the Moat to live in, and treat you as his first son should be treated, and I thought that I might serve you as a younger brother, and obtain, if not your affection, at least your tolerance and sympathy. You came, and I was first to meet you. You refused to take my hand, and I felt as if no hope were left to me."

"Poor wretch!" again thought Blase, looking with compassion upon Eugenius, who sat silent with his head bowed.

"That rebuff, Mr. Godwin," continued

Eugenius, "made an impression upon my mind that study could not efface. I saw you constantly as I saw you when you refused to acknowledge me — standing against the light like a giant whose path had been stopped by a presumptuous pigmy—for indeed, sir, you did seem actually to tower over me in your indignation. Let that pass. Shortly afterwards I heard that inquiries were being made in the neighbourhood concerning your relations with Sir Gilbert. The inquirer was a Jew; and from him I learnt that you intended raising money, if possible, on your future estate; and I also discovered how little likelihood there was of your obtaining money from him. I resolved then that I would go to London and seek you out, and offer what help was in my power. I do not wish to conceal that an ardent desire to obtain your sympathy, if not your affection, was at

the bottom of my wish to help you. On the plea that I required recreation I left the Moat, taking with me all the money I possessed. For weeks I sought you in vain. At the gaming houses they spoke of you as of one who had ceased to be, and I might ere this have given up my quest, but that one night I saw you in a theatre. It was Drury Lane. I was in the pit and nearly opposite the box in which you sat; but your attention was too much occupied to notice me. After the performance I tried to follow you. You passed me at the entrance, but a lady was on your arm, and I could not speak to you. In the street, as I was following your carriage, I was struck down by a horse and narrowly escaped being run over. I saw no more of you; but I was encouraged to seek again. Concluding that your tastes were theatrical, I consorted with players, and it was whilst I was in the company of Mr.

Bannister that I heard of your necessity. Through your servant I discovered where you lived, and having waited until I thought the obligation I had the good fortune to render you was gone from your recollection, I ventured to call upon you, for I desired to win, if possible, your consideration and sympathy by an appeal to your generosity rather than to your gratitude."

With this peroration Eugenius concluded, and put Blase once more in the perplexing condition of having something to do without knowing how to do it. He was not at all disposed to open his arms and embrace Eugenius; he did not feel that he could even shake his hand heartily. But this repugnance arose from some inner feeling, and not from any distrust aroused by the recital he had listened to. There was nothing but what seemed reasonable and right in that. The motives

Eugenius professed to have could not be called in question since, as he had said, they were so clearly apart from his material interests. He saw nothing unnatural or strained in the avowed principles. It was an age of false sentiment, but, for that age, the "confession" of Eugenius seemed unstudied and particularly free from artificial embellishment. Blase was ashamed that he could not respond without reluctance to this appeal to his generosity.

"I beg you to believe," he said, forcing himself to speak, "that I sympathize with your misfortunes, and that if it is in my power to do more than repay your disinterested service in my behalf——"

"It is in your power," Eugenius said, interrupting him. "You can make me your debtor by giving me that which is incomparably more to me than the guineas I have to offer you."

"I am dull, Mr. Eugenius; will you tell me what it is I can give you?"

"Your friendship."

"I cannot command my emotions," said Blase uneasily; "and it were hypocrisy to pretend a feeling which, to speak truly, is absent from my heart. Friendship is a sentiment of slow growth with me."

"As all things that are to live must be at all times. I ask you to give me the consideration that I deserve, and I do not doubt that in time I shall earn your entire affection. I am confident of the future if you will have but the patience to put my fidelity to the test. Make me your companion, your servant, if you will; and if you find me undeserving even of a servant's place, dismiss me at the moment as you would a faithless servant. Nay, more, Mr. Godwin, suffer me to be near you only while my services are indispen-

sable, and you will find that for a better reason you will desire to keep me by you afterwards."

A peremptory knock at the door below gave force to the latter part of this argument. With a bailiff demanding admission to the house it would have been, to say the least of it, unreasonable to refuse friendship to a man who desired nothing better than to help him out of his difficulties.

"Be it so," said Blase, and he gave his hand in token of amity.

Eugenius rose to take the offered hand, and with an air of profound respect bowed over it in silence; then raising his head, he said—

"Now, Mr. Godwin, I will pay your creditors as they come until my little store is exhausted."

"It would have been much better," said

Mr. Tickel, when he heard of this arrangement, "if he had given you a lump sum down, and gone back to the country."

And so thought Blase.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. TICKEL TAKES HIS YOUNG FRIEND TO TASK.

During the three weeks that followed, Eugenius was constantly with Blase. He paid the creditors who came to the house; he paid the tavern scores and hackney coachmen when they went out. He was indispensable to Blase, and yet there was not a day passed but that Blase wished him at the other end of the earth. He was Blase's old man of the sea; there was no shaking him off. Eugenius was merely carrying out the contract Blase had accepted.

"I can't tell why I hate that man,"

said Blase, speaking to Tickel one night after Eugenius had left the house.

"Nor I neither," replied the parson. "He has paid off a dozen bills at the least. Unfortunately they are only the small debts; I only hope the large accounts may come in before he takes offence at your treatment of him, and leaves you to pay them yourself. He must have the temper of a saint to stand, as he does, your short words and sour looks. He never reproaches you by a single word."

"I should like him better if he did. I should have some sort of respect for him if he would turn round like a man, and say—Look here, I'll not stand this treatment from you. But all he does when I feel mad with anger, is to fold his hands and bow his head."

"That is the resignation of a Christian."

"Then hang me if I like Christians."

"He is well read," continued the parson,

in meek expostulation. "He has wit enough to see a joke, and he's not too wise to laugh at it. He is not a fool, he knows good wine from bad; he plays the music very prettily, and there's a certain charm in his conversation which everyone appreciates save you."

"Granted that in all externals he is to be admired, there must be an underlying cause for my dislike. 'Tis an instinctive antipathy, like that which all have for reptiles. Why do you hate a snake? Its form is perfect, its skin is beautiful, its movement is graceful; and the only reason you can give for loathing the snake is—because it is a snake. Why should I hate this man Eugenius but for the same intuitive knowledge of evil? 'Tis not in nature for a man to turn in hatred against the friend who has helped him."

"Humph!" said the parson, opening his snuff-box. "I am not so certain of that, my young friend."

Blase thrust his hands in his pockets, and stretched out his legs, frowning at the fire.

"As for your instinctive reptile loathing theory," continued the parson, after taking his pinch, "the antipathy is not sufficiently general to be taken as a positive fact. For example, I have no instinctive dislike to Mr. Eugenius, especially when he's for a bottle; nor do I think," he added, quietly looking aslant at Blase, "that any strong feeling of repugnance is shown towards him by the ladies in Piccadilly. 'Tis a thousand pities you can't play the music, Blase, though I doubt if you're not too big for a graceful player at the piano; it wants someone thin, and hollow-eyed, to arouse a tender sympathy."

Blase drew his legs up with an angry jerk, and taking a hand from his pocket rested his chin in his palm, and his

elbow on his knee, glaring steadily into the fire.

"And I wish to the Lord, Blase, instead of singing about Polls, and Sues, and Jacks, and Bens, and all this Dibdin rubbish of bullets and bacca-boxes, you would get hold of some *il mios*, or *madre d'amors*, or some such Italian trash, for it's ten times more agreeable to the fair sex. Who on earth but you would sing about Wapping stairs, and mending breeches, before delicate ladies? and then to roar the thing as if you were proud of it is barbarous. It might pass if you could squeak it out in a little high voice, with a run here and a shake there, to make the words less distinguishable. Now Eugenius might sing you a dozen such songs, and for the life of you you couldn't tell what one of 'em was about. Last night for instance——"

"I ought never to have let him enter

that house," Blase said, cutting short Mr. Tickel's illustration.

"And I warrant you wouldn't if you could have helped it. How could you refuse to introduce him when you had promised him friendship, and taken his money. But I wish you could have fobbed him off, with all my heart! There would have been none of this natural antipathy if you had kept him out of that house."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Blase, with a brusque laugh, "Do you think I am jealous of the fellow? Do you imagine I dislike him because his singing and playing happens to please Miss Liston and her aunt?"

"I do," Mr. Tickel said emphatically.

"Then I beg to assure you that you are in error. I have a better opinion of myself and Miss Liston than to fear that such a man as Eugenius can usurp my place in her regard."

"More fool you."

"You had better leave the room if you can't hold your tongue," Blase said angrily.

"I sha'n't leave the room, Blase, and I sha'n't hold my tongue, and I sha'n't be mealy-mouthed neither. If you detest Eugenius for his complaisance you sha'n't have cause to detest me for the same reason. A man doesn't stand upon ceremony when his friend's a drowning, but takes the readiest means to save him, no matter how rough they be. And I tell you that if you let a foolish feeling of pride blind you to your danger, you're a fool, and a d——d fool into the bargain. There; if strong language will awake you to a sense of your peril my turn is served."

"How much has Eugenius paid on my account?"

"A couple of hundred at the outside.

'Tis the little gnats, and not the great hornets, that plague us."

"Good heavens! to think that for a petty sum like that I should be the slave of a man I hate! Are there no means of raising a couple of hundred, that I may pay him off?"

"None that I know of, short of going on the road; and if you paid him off, that would not get you out of your dilemma."

"What will?"

"I'll tell you, my young friend. Just rouse yourself out of this surly humour you have fallen into of late; for 'tis that will bring you to grief."

"What does it matter whether my humour is surly or otherwise?"

"Everything. In the first place, it may cost you the support of Mr. Eugenius, for, failing to derive any satisfaction from such a friendship as you show for him, he may naturally decline to continue the friendship

he at present shows for you. You must admit 'tis a precious bad bargain for him just now."

"Well, supposing I lose him?" said Blase, in a tone which signified that he could support the loss with complacency.

"The next thing would be that you would lose Miss Liston."

Blase started, and looked at the parson for explanation.

"I don't profess to know much about the fair sex," continued Mr. Tickel, "so far as genteel young misses are concerned; but I know very well that, was I in Miss Liston's place, and were called upon to choose between you and Mr. Eugenius, I shouldn't hesitate a moment in accepting him; for, while he does his utmost to make himself interesting and agreeable, you do your utmost to show the unamiable side of your character. At one time you were lively and gay; now you are sullen and

morose. You were absolutely rude to her t'other night."

"When?"

"When you were sitting by her side at the piano turning over the music, and she asked Eugenius to sing the duet with her. You got up from your seat, and turned your back on the piano."

"You don't suppose I would play the lacquey for his amusement?"

"That is precisely what you did do; for undoubtedly he found more amusement in being alone with Miss Liston than if you had remained, and I know nothing more distinctive of a lacquey than rudeness to those who are not in a position to resent the affront." Mr. Tickel took a vigorous pinch of snuff, as if he were conscious of having said a right and manly thing. "You give more of your time, and all your gossip, to Mrs. Romsey," he continued. "Now, look what madness that is, Blase.

It gives your rival a chance of displaying his airs and graces, and forces Miss Liston to attend to them; and 'tis clear to my eyes, if it is not to yours, that she finds more pleasure in his society now than she did when you first introduced him. I don't think she liked him at all for the first week, but I am sure she does now."

"'Tis pique."

"Call it what you will, the effect's the same. Now, how must this end?"

"I haven't troubled myself to think."

"That is your fault. You never do think how things are to end, and thus have arisen all your troubles. I'll tell you how it will end. His patience worn out. Eugenius will tell you that, as he finds it impossible to make himself agreeable to you, it will be best to give up the attempt."

"Good."

"He will tell Miss Liston why he can no longer visit them as your friend."

"Good again."

"To exonerate himself from blame, he may explain what pains he has been at to secure your affection."

"Do you think he would be mean enough to tell them of the money he has lent me?"

"I don't see why he should conceal it. He will have no reason to be silent out of love for you. I should out with everything was I in his place; then over you'll go, and there'll be every likelihood of his stepping in your shoes."

"Oh, she could never marry such a fellow as that," cried Blase.

"Why not? You hope she will marry you."

"Do you see no difference between him and me?" Blase asked haughtily.

"Yes, and for your sake I wish I saw

less," retorted the undaunted parson. "Let us compare you impartially. You have a straight, good forehead, a pair of devilish handsome eyes when you're in fair humour, an aquiline nose, a pretty mouth, a fine set of teeth, a splendid chest, and as neat a leg as I wish to see. You are fairly educated, not particularly wise, and excellent company when things go right. You have a warm, impulsive disposition, the physical courage of a bull-dog, and the moral weakness of a woman who, by reason of a too sensitive affection, shrinks from a duty that would give pain; and that's about all I can say for you."

"And enough, too. Half-a-crown could win no higher praise from a fortune teller."

"Unfortunately, about half of your virtues are hidden from Miss Liston. She sees only that you are a fine, healthy

specimen of an Englishman, who can make himself confoundedly unpleasant if it suits him. Now for Eugenius. He is not absolutely ugly or deformed. He has a countenance with what Mrs. Romsey calls 'character' in it. There is an intellectual expression in his face which is rather wanting in yours, my young friend. With those deep-sunk eyes, and lantern jaws, and thin flexible lips, he might be a saint or the veriest conspirator that ever plotted the destruction of a State; and this uncertainty gives a fascination and interest to his features. He has a pretty knowledge of music, and can talk you into silence upon art and poetry. What his inner feelings are it is impossible to say, for he has the art, which is entirely wanting in you, of concealing what he feels. I don't think the Inquisition would have racked much out of him if he had lived in the good old times and been subjected to

question. And 'tis this resignation and calm submission under your obvious ill-treatment which gives him the air of a martyr. Girls like martyrs. He takes care that Miss Liston shall see all his good qualities, and I shouldn't be surprised if he lacks some of those he affects to have.

"There you are both. Now, which is Miss Liston to choose? If she were merely a pretty girl, I should say she would choose you; but I take it she has too much sense to marry a man merely because he is handsome. There's a wonderful deal of tetchiness about that girl, as I warned you at first—ambition, right feeling, self-respect, and all that sort of thing; and, more than that, she has a clear sense that her life will not end on the day of her marriage, but begin, and that as it begins so it must continue; at least, so I gather from my observations and Mrs.

Romsey's remarks. Girls of her kind are sometimes shy in taking handsome men. They have reason to know that they are not so dependable as the ugly ones. Happily, she has had no experience; but still she may have a notion that you will become fat and heavy in middle life, and rather a dull companion; while, on the other hand, she may safely reckon on Eugenius keeping slim and spiritual. She may find, in his thin face and spare habit, a kind of beauty that goes deeper than her eyes. She may believe him capable of gratifying her ambition, her religious instincts, her intellectual aspirations——"

"Have done, parson," cried Blase.

Mr. Tickel folded his hands on his stomach, and was silent.

"You are right," continued Blase. "With her sentiment and her inexperience she might yield to the fascination of such a man. But how am I to stay her from

such an awful mistake, for, by the Lord, I *feel* that he is not true?"

"Take the advice I gave you at the beginning of this long talk—lay aside your sullen humour. Put your pride in your pocket. Leave pique for girls to play with. Show a bright face, an amiable disposition, a gay heart to Miss Liston; try to make her laugh instead of doing your best to make her cry. Eclipse the sickly glimmer of Eugenius by your own manly lustre. Treat him, as you treat me, so that he cannot quarrel with you—laugh at him. Make fun of his sentiment, and his lackadaisical melancholy."

"Good God!" cried Blase. "How can I act the part? I have no more turn for strategy than this poker. How can I banter and be on laughing terms with Eugenius when I am longing to have him out on the grass with my sword against his? and how can I be gay before

her when I feel so cursedly ashamed of myself that I could fling myself out of the window to put an end to my falsehood? No, parson, I've come to the end of my skill as a trickster."

The parson said nothing in reply; he sighed heavily, and shook his head as with raised eyebrows he looked into the fire.

"More work for poor old Tickel," thought he.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF A STRANGE DISCLOSURE WHICH LED TO A SEPARATION BETWEEN BLASE AND EUGENIUS.

It struck Mr. Tickel that it would be well to get as many bills paid as possible before there came about a rupture of the relations between Blase and Eugenius; so on his way to Will's the next morning, he called in upon the tailor, to whom Blase owed sixty or seventy guineas, and had himself measured for a new suit.

"By the way," said he, when the tailor showed some reluctance to cut into a cloth that the parson had selected as the best in the shop, "Why don't you send in

your account? Mr. Godwin objects to long credit."

"Why, sir, to tell you the truth, I have called nigh on a dozen times for my money, but Mr. Godwin has allus been hout."

"He's at home now, and is likely to be for the next half hour. I should carry the bill to him at once, if I were you."

The grateful tailor made no further demur to cutting the cloth Mr. Tickel desired, and as soon as the burly parson was out of the shop put on his hat and started off with alacrity to demand payment of his bill.

Blase was seated on one side of the breakfast-table reading the *Times* newspaper, Eugenius on the other reading a thin red-edged octavo of Spinoza's ethics when Hutchins brought in the bill, and handed it to Blase.

Blase glanced at it, Eugenius looked over the top of his book.

"Is it for me?" he asked.

"If you please," answered Blase, giving the paper to Hutchins to carry round the table.

"You can tell Mr. Shears to wait," said Eugenius after looking at the bill.

Hutchins left the room. Eugenius rose, went to the door, opened it and closed it again softly. His suspicion of eavesdroppers and his precaution against being overheard were a constant source of annoyance to Blase. He turned his chair and fixed his attention on the newspaper to avoid expressing the irritation he felt.

"May I trouble you to give me your attention?" said Eugenius.

"Oh yes, what's the matter?" asked Blase sharply, looking over his shoulder.

"This bill is for sixty-eight pounds five shillings, and my little capital is not sufficient to meet it by some pounds. Two hundred and fifty pounds was all I had."

It was with a certain degree of satisfaction that Blase heard this announcement; it seemed to him that anything would be better than a continuation of the present state of things.

"Well," he said, throwing down the newspaper and turning round to face Eugenius.

"I foresaw that before long this would happen," said Eugenius in his calm measured manner. "From Mr. Tickel's memoranda and the bills he has saved, I found that your liabilities amount to fifteen hundred pounds, and knowing that sooner or later some greater help than it is in my power to render would be necessary to save you from—from inconvenience, I took the liberty to write to Sir Gilbert Godwin stating your position and imploring him to save his son from—" again Eugenius paused.

"From public disgrace," said Blase.

"That was considerate of you and kind." He was ashamed that despite his obligation he could not feel more grateful. "I suppose," he continued, "your application was useless."

"Not entirely. Sir Gilbert authorized me to pay every debt you have, and to offer you besides, the sum of three thousand pounds."

"Good Heavens!" cried Blase, "are you jesting?"

"No. I have since assured myself that the money is lying with his agent in Lombard Street, ready for your acceptance."

"And when did you receive this intimation of my father's generosity?"

"A week since."

"Then why on earth did you not let me know before?"

Eugenius hesitated to reply. Blase who was white hot with excitement, felt ex-

asperated by the cold imperturbability of his companion.

"What motive had you, sir," he asked, "for concealing this fact from me?"

"I concealed it because it seemed to me possible that you might succeed in clearing yourself from these embarrassments by other means."

"What other means?" Blase asked, assuming a boldness which his quick blush and shifting glance belied.

"By marriage with Miss Liston."

Blase dropped his glance to the table, and faltering said:

"You might have known that any method would be more acceptable to me than a mean one."

"Any method?"—clearly he knew of Mr. Phillips's offer.

"Any that did not involve the misery of those I love," said Blase.

"You will forgive me for not thinking

worse of your intentions than you yourself considered them."

"Let us come to the point," Blase said, knitting his brows as he pushed the breakfast things aside to make place for his arms on the table. "What is the condition my father imposes?"

"The conveyance of your hereditary right to his estate."

"What!" Blase exclaimed, "he asks me to sell my heritage?"

"In effect. You now understand why I hesitated to lay his proposal before you."

Blase pushed his chair back and fixed his eyes on Eugenius as he tried to comprehend all that this offer implied. Eugenius met his gaze with unflinching calmness.

"Where is my father's letter?" Blase asked presently.

Eugenius drew out his pocket-book, and opening it said:

"The letter is written in the hand of Father Dominick, but it bears your father's signature."

"I don't want to see it. I begin to understand now. The proposal comes in reality from Father Dominick; it is the final blow which is to complete my ruin—the ruin he has meditated from the hour you were born."

Eugenius dropped his head in humiliation, as he invariably did when reference was made to his father's sin.

"Tell me honestly," cried Blase fiercely, "if you can be honest, that you knew this proposal was to come, that you came to London to turn my misfortunes to your own advantage, that you know full well this conveyance is to make you heir in my place to my father's estates."

"You are heated, Mr. Godwin," said Eugenius rising; "I will leave you until you are cool enough to see that nothing

in my conduct justifies your harsh suspicions."

"Wait!" cried Blase. "There's one thing that's best done in heat and that is self-destruction. How is this conveyance to be made?"

"Sir Gilbert encloses in his letter a paper."

"Written by Father Dominick?"

"Written by Father Dominick," Eugenius answered.

"I knew it," laughed Blase; "and what's in this paper?"

"A promise on your part to sign the legal instrument conveying your hereditary rights to your father, when it shall in due course be presented to you. Sir Gilbert's agent is instructed to pay all your present debts, and to give you three thousand pounds the moment you present this paper with your signature."

"That's simple enough, isn't it?" Blase

said bitterly. "The devil takes care to make suicide easy. Where's the paper?"

"Here."

Blase rose from his seat, and fetched a pen and the ink.

"Well, where's the paper?" he asked, glancing savagely at Eugenius, who stood with the pocket-book unopened in his hand.

"God forgive you, sir," said Eugenius sadly; "for you do me a cruel wrong to punish me thus for my parents' fault. Is it by my sin that I bear the brand of 'bastard?' Is it to myself I owe these faculties and features which excite your antipathy? Can you justly charge me with any offence, save that of striving with too much perseverance to win your love?"

Thought Blase, "What a hound am I;" and he hung his head.

"I shall weary your patience no more, Mr. Godwin," continued Eugenius in deep

melancholy. "I have done wrong to trouble you so long. From the first, I saw that you disliked me, and that dislike has increased with time; why I struggled so obstinately to gain your esteem in the face of such a deep-rooted prejudice you could understand only by suffering as I suffer."

"I beg you to pardon me," said Blase, in a husky voice. "My misfortunes have made me so desperate, that I forget I am still a gentleman;" he turned to where Eugenius stood, and held out his hand.

"This heals my wound," said Eugenius, bowing over the hand he had taken in his. "I am glad to part thus, since probably we shall never meet again. Our lives run in diverging lines. Farewell."

Blase bowed in silence. He felt that he ought to say something kindly, but his heart refused to speak. Even farewell stuck in his throat.

Eugenius, in turning the handle of the door, paused, looked at the pocket-book in his hand a moment, and then:

"I still have Sir Gilbert's letter, and the paper," he said reflectively, "and whether you shall use the power they confer is not for me to decide. You have a sufficient safeguard in your mistrust of Father Dominick. I leave them with you to destroy or employ as you think proper."

This anti-climax spoilt the piece, so far as Blase's sympathy with Eugenius was concerned.

"After all, *is* he a martyr or a sham?" he asked, when the door had closed upon Eugenius, and he found himself alone with the papers in his hand. "With his subtle knowledge of me, would he have left temptation in my way if he thought I could resist it?"

Some question on that score might still have dwelt in the mind of Eugenius as he

lingered in the street, keeping a furtive watch upon the door that had closed upon him. He had not long to wait for an answer. The door opened, and Hutchins, coming down to the kerbstone, hailed a distant coach.

When the hackney coach drew up at the door, Blase stepped into it, and Mr. Shears, the tailor, took his place by the driver; and then the coach turned round and rattled off in the direction of Lombard Street.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH BLASE GAINS THE HAND OF LYDIA.

Blase was in high spirits when he arrived at Piccadilly that night. His pockets were full of money, and he had eaten a famous dinner with Mr. Tickel, and drunk freely to his own health. The wine had warmed his blood, and tinged his vision with its rosy hue. He saw everything in bright colours. He turned a deaf ear to the still small voice that had so worried him of late, and gave all his attention to the parson. As for Mr. Tickel, he could have seen Death itself in lively colours over that last bottle of Burgundy.

"You never made a better bargain in

your life, my young friend," said he. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, any day. Your father's but a score of years older than you, and I warrant he'll not die till eighty, and what use would an estate be to you at sixty, when all a man needs is a nurse and a mess of gruel? I will drink the baronet's health in a full glass, if you will have the goodness to pass the bottle, Blase, for I no longer grudge him the blessing of a sound constitution. Here's to him! . . . Rid of your incubus--Eugenius, your debts, and your scruples, you awake to a new life! Finish the bottle, my boy, and so to Piccadilly with a gay heart. March to victory like the whats'enames, laughing! Take your sweetheart by the waist, and hold her your prisoner until she accepts your terms!"

Mrs. Romsey was delighted with the vivacity of Mr. Tickel and Blase, and fell

at once into their cheerful humour; but Lydia, knowing nothing of what had happened, looked at Blase in silent, large-eyed astonishment, and seemed frightened by this sudden and unlooked for change in his behaviour.

There was a small and comfortable room adjoining the drawing-room, where Mrs. Romsey had lately spent her evenings, the distance lending a certain charm to the music, and enabling her to engage freely in conversation without interruption; and thither Mr. Tickel adroitly led her, leaving Blase and Lydia alone.

Blase had already touched upon half a dozen subjects, dismissing each with a joke, and now a little subdued by the departure of Mrs. Romsey and the parson, he turned to a basket of growing spring flowers that he had bought in the afternoon at Covent Garden and sent to Lydia, and talked of them. As he was running on he suddenly

lifted his eyes and found Lydia looking at him. He saw by the expression of her lovely soft eyes that she was thinking more of him than of what he said.

"How grave, and still, and full of wonder you look," he said in tender admiration. "'Tis so this graceful narcissus will look, I think, when its petals unclose, and it sees for the first time the marvel of the moving world."

Lydia smiled with a little inclination of her head; she liked compliments.

"Thank you," she said. "I love the narcissus above all flowers."

"I think you must love all things that are beautiful and sweet," said Blase, trembling with love as he looked into the girl's young earnest face.

"Do not you?" she asked innocently.

"With all my soul!" he answered, and in such a manner which told her that she was to him all that was beautiful and

sweet. The colour ran up her cheeks, which had been of late a little pale; and looking down at the basket in some confusion, she said—

"Did you send me these flowers?"

"I was passing through Covent Garden, and the flowers stared me in the face, and——"

"And you thought of me!" Lydia laughed.

"It is not necessary to see beautiful flowers to be reminded of you. 'Twas thinking of you that led my steps to Covent Garden. There's scarce a step I take but owes its motive to a thought of you."

The colour deepened in Lydia's cheek. She was beginning to forget the pain she had secretly suffered by his coldness in the pleasure she derived from this returning warmth. But she could not quite forgive his recent neglect; so just as Blase was

about to follow up the advantage he thought he had gained, she said abruptly—

"Is Mr. Eugenius coming to-night?"

"I hope not," Blase replied in a harsh voice; and then to obviate any discussion upon a subject which seemed at once to throw a damp upon his spirits, he turned to the tambour-frame, and said: "How does the work go on?"

Lydia turned back the cover.

"You seem to have made a prodigious advance," he declared.

"That, perhaps, is because it is so long since you took any interest in it."

The rebuke was well merited, but Blase felt it necessary to defend himself.

"You have been so occupied lately," he said.

"Not so much occupied but that I would gladly have given a few minutes to you if you had shown any desire to see what I had been doing during the day."

"I am afraid I have been very ill-tempered for some time past," he said, in a tone which seemed to demand commiseration.

"And is that the reason why you were careless of my happiness?"

"Have I given you pain?" he asked quickly.

She looked at him in silence; but there was a reproach in her eyes that went straight to his heart.

"Oh, I am sorry!" he said. "I am ashamed that I thought of myself and not of you. But I have been worried and troubled—will you go on with your wool-work now?"

"Yes—unless you prefer music. I have learnt the accompaniment to Mr. Dibdin's last song."

"You cannot like those rough songs," said Blase, remembering Mr. Tickel's observation.

"I do like them. They are manly and good. I like them better, perhaps, than you like sentimental music."

"Not better than I like that music when you render it. But I would rather you took your needle now—we can talk, and I have so much that I feel I must tell you."

Lydia sat down at once and took her needle, while Blase arranged the light for for her.

"Now I am ready," she said. "You were saying that you have been in trouble lately."

"Do you know, Miss Liston," he said, thinking to surprise her by a confession, "that I have had to borrow money?"

"I knew that you could not have much," Lydia said, going on with her work calmly. "Miss Davenant told me that she thought you were poor, and that you concealed it for fear Captain Davenant would sell his coins to supply your needs.

I think it was very good of you to keep your difficulties secret from them."

Blase was astonished, not Lydia. "What a fool I have been, and how unjust to think she would like me less for my poverty," thought he.

"Did you owe much?" asked Lydia.

"Fifteen hundred or two thousand pounds, I daresay."

"That sounds a good large sum."

"There were bailiffs in the drawing-room when we came home from the concert."

"And is that why we had to stay in the bedroom so long?" she asked, looking up from her work with fun sparkling in her eyes.

Blase nodded.

"Oh, how droll!" cried Lydia, laughing. "How I wish I had known it! Aunt said that they were dreadful looking gentlemen." With that quick transition from

gay to grave, which was characteristic of her disposition to regard the feelings of others as well as her own, she grew suddenly serious, and bending over her work, said: "But I wish I had known it for another reason. And was it these troubles that made you so strange and cold?"

"Not entirely. To keep out of the debtor's prison I was compelled to accept the assistance of Eugenius."

"Ah! That is why you introduced him to us."

"Yes. I did so with the utmost reluctance. For although against him individually I knew of nothing discreditable, and know nothing now except that he has the misfortune to be the son of a villain——"

"Miss Davenant told me about him," said Lydia quietly.

"Yet," continued Blase, "I had from

the very first an instinctive antipathy to him, which made his services an insupportable obligation."

"I see. It was his presence that made you so unhappy here."

"Ye—s, it must have been this antipathy, although Tickel says——"

"What does Mr. Tickel say?"

"He says that my antipathy was nothing but—but jealousy."

Lydia smiled over her work, not displeased with Mr. Tickel's explanation.

"I am glad 'tis nothing worse," she said. "At first I thought you were regretting the loss of Captain Davenant and his dear sweet daughter; and then when I saw it could not be that, I began to wonder if I had done or said anything to grieve you, and I thought of it a good deal and—and—but that's all past now. Yet I wish I had known this before."

"I could not tell you before, for 'twas

only this morning I got clear of my debts and parted with Eugenius."

"But I could have lent you the money. You don't know what a sum I have in the bank, and I am sure I don't know what to do with it. Why didn't you ask me?"

"Do you think I have no pride?" asked Blase abashed.

"Pride!" said Lydia in surprise. "I don't think I can have any pride of that sort, for if I wanted a thing that you could get me, I should ask you for it, knowing that you would be only too glad to help me. But my pride would prevent me from accepting anything from anyone I disliked. It is not as if you were appealing for charity, or as if I should make you take this money as a gift. That would be debasing indeed! But there is nothing mean, to my eyes, in accepting a loan which you would repay when you inherited your estate."

Blase bowed his head.

"Great God!" thought he, "What have I lost!"

"I am afraid you did not look upon me as a very true friend," continued Lydia.

"I think I shall never cease to discover new proofs that you are more beautiful and more generous than any other woman."

Lydia smiled again.

"You are not in danger of being sent to prison now?" she asked.

"No. Every debt is paid. That is why you find me so changed to-night. And I have quite a lot of money; and do you know my dear old granddad wants me to make Redwater my home when I marry, that he——"

"Oh there, I have done that all wrong!" cried Lydia, turning her burning face away from Blase, and trying to keep her fingers firm as she picked out the false stitch. Her scissors fell, and in picking

them up Blase found the thread of his conversation broken. He was not long in starting another.

"How is it you do not wear a ring?" he asked.

"We weren't allowed to wear any jewels at school, and since then I have not thought about them much."

"I wish you would wear this," said Blase, fumbling his finger and thumb in his fob, and finally bringing out a glittering ring that he had given sixty guineas for five minutes after leaving the agent's in Lombard Street.

Lydia turned from her work and took the ring in her tricksy fingers with that eager delight which girls and women feel in looking at gems.

"Oh, that *is* lovely!" she cried.

"May I put it on your finger?"

She looked up from the ring to his face with sudden gravity.

"But that means a great deal, doesn't it?" she asked.

"That depends. I did not think of its meaning when I bought it. I only saw that it was handsome, and thought how much more beautiful it would look on your white finger."

"But it does mean a great deal," said Lydia seriously. "We used to talk about serious things—that dear dead friend that I have so often told you about and I; and once I remember we talked about rings. And she said that gold was the symbol of most precious love, and the hoop a symbol of eternity. And if I let you put that ring upon my finger, it would mean that you gave and that I accepted undying love."

"And if I give, will you refuse undying love?"

She looked in his face for some moments, and read there the earnest, strenuous love

that was in his soul. She did not smile; her cheeks were quite pale; her eyes had in them an intense anxiety. It seemed as though she were waiting for some inner guidance; and suddenly, as if that guiding voice had spoken, a ray of joy shot from her eyes, her lips trembled, and she raised her hand from her lap.

"Lydia," murmured Blase, as he held her palm and slipped the ring upon her finger; "my Lydia, darling Lydia!"

"Dear Blase," she answered trembling. And then she bent forward and lifted up her face to be kissed.

"Well, if you're not going to play the music, we may as well sit altogether sociably!" cried Mrs. Romsey, coming through the door of communication.

"D—— the old woman," muttered Blase.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH BLASE LOSES THE HAND HE HAD WON.

Despite the remonstrance of Mrs. Romsey, Lydia insisted on accompanying the gentlemen to the street door when they departed. She threw a lace shawl over her head and round her throat, and that made her look more witchingly pretty than ever.

"I must see you alone to-morrow," whispered Blase, as they descended the stairs side by side.

"Come to-morrow afternoon," she said.

Blase found her hand as it hung by her side in the folds of her dress and pressed it, and felt with a thrill of delight the pressure returned. And she stood at the

door and looked after him as he went away. He, looking back, saw her face peeping out, and it seemed to him that Heaven had opened to him; but with his joy was mingled an uneasy feeling of unworthiness—a consciousness that if all were known the gates might not have been opened to him, and that he owed his felicity to Heaven's blindness rather than to his own merits.

"If I had told all at first," he thought, "or if I had even told her how I had sold my heritage, before I asked her to take the ring, I should have nothing to fear. She does not value wealth, and she would have found an excuse for what I really was compelled to do. She loves me. By George, how sweet she was! There's little she'd not forgive me. I'll out with the whole truth to-morrow, and then all will be over." He accompanied this reflection with a sigh of relief, from which it was

evident that he concluded all would be over on the right side for him.

Lydia was alone when he entered the drawing-room in the afternoon. She had risen at the sound of his footsteps and stood in the centre of the room to receive him.

"Lydia," he said, stretching out his hands.

She stood still for a moment with that same expression of anxious questioning in her eyes which he had seen there before she accepted his ring; only for a moment she stood thus irresolute, and then with a little murmur of delight she ran to him and suffered him to encircle her with his arms. His lips touched her shining soft hair, for she had bent her blushing cheek upon his breast. She blushed in happiness and not in shame, she was proud of her love, as he saw when presently she raised her face and looked up into his eyes.

"I want to talk about the future, Lydia dearest," he said when his rapture was somewhat subdued, and he sat beside her.

"About the future?" she repeated with a tone of anxiety in her voice.

"About Redwater and all that," he said.

"Ah, yes, let us talk about that," she said cheerfully, as she nestled closer to his side.

Blase hesitated a little. "Better get it out at once," thought he; so after caressing her whilst he sought for words to make his confession easy, he said:

"I did not tell you, darling, how I managed to get rid of my debts, and shake off Eugenius."

"Has that anything to do with Redwater?" she asked.

"Well—not exactly—but I think I ought to tell you of this matter at once."

She raised herself from his side, and turned her eyes upon him with such a

queer little air of fear, that Blase could not but laugh.

"You look as if you thought I was about to hurt you," he said. "What a dear little April face you have. At one moment 'tis all sunny warmth, and at another 'tis almost sad. A minute ago your eyes seemed to tell me I was the finest fellow in all the world, and now they seem to say that you are not quite so sure about it."

"I should not love you if I did not think you were the best man there is," said Lydia. "And when I looked at you a minute ago I said to myself, I would trust you, and you alone, with all my heart though all the world speak ill of you."

"And do you not think that at this moment?"

"Yes, or I should take my hand from yours. Something you said made me anxious for the moment; what was it?"

"I was saying that I thought I had better tell you how I got rid of my debts. My father paid them and gave me a pretty sum of money as well, in response to an appeal made in my behalf by Eugenius."

She bent her head so that he could scarcely see her face; but he felt that her hands trembled when he relaxed his fingers. He paused. Suddenly she looked up with a return of confidence in her face.

"That was a free gift, wasn't it, dear?" she asked.

"Not entirely; the fact is there was a stipulation which—— What is the matter, love?"

"Nothing. Go on; your father made a stipulation."

"A stipulation that I should sign a deed of conveyance which would enable him to dispose freely of his estate."

"And you signed that deed?"

"Virtually. I signed a paper promising

to put my signature to the deed. After all, dear, as a mere business speculation the advantage was on my side, for the estate would not have come to me until my father's death, and he may outlive me."

Lydia drew her hand from his.

"Was your welfare only to be considered?" she asked.

Blase could not reply for some seconds. It was his turn to tremble and grow pale.

"Lydia!" he faltered, "why have you taken your hand away?"

"Because you have valued my love less than a business speculation to your advantage."

"I protest, dear, I never thought of the affair in that relation," he stammered.

"But you should have done so. Would you value my affection at all, if I did anything without first thinking whether it would give you pain or pleasure?"

"You will not love me less because I

have relinquished my right to this estate, dear? Happiness is not dependent on money."

"No, but it is upon the honour and truth of those who are near us."

"Dear child," he began in a tone of expostulation.

"I am not a child!" said Lydia, with a movement of impatience.

"Your anger is out of proportion with my offence; for it seems to me that 'tis not the loss of my estate, but the concealment of my difficulties which you resent. You make me wish I had kept the secret until you were my wife?"

"It had been so much the worse for you. I would never have trusted you again."

She rose from her chair as she spoke, seeming to scorn to sit beside a man who could be guilty of such baseness. Blase followed her in alarm.

"Oh, Lydia," he cried, "be kind, be

reasonable! I have done wrong and I have confessed my fault. 'Tis not as though you had heard the truth from another. If, for instance, Eugenius had been bound enough to tell you——"

"He did tell me!" said Lydia, turning quickly. "He told me this morning, and I would not believe him." She stopped; the tears sprang up into her eyes, and she added in a pitiful tone, "I had such faith in you."

She brushed the tears away quickly, as though she were ashamed of her weakness; and before Blase could avail himself of her momentary tenderness to plead for forgiveness, she continued:

"He told me that failing this help from your father you would have married me to pay your debts with my money. Was that true?"

Blase hung his head; he would not try to excuse himself.

"When he told me that," said Lydia, "I ordered him to leave the room. All that he could say—all that my aunt could say—could not overcome my faith in you; and when I looked at you but a little while ago I felt that I had not trusted you wrongly. I would have staked my life upon your truth! I told Eugenius to his face he was a liar. Now with shame I must confess to him that I was unjust, and that he is more to be trusted than the man I loved."

She pulled at the ring which Blase had given her but the night before; it clung to her finger.

"Oh, Lydia!" cried Blase in supplication, "you do not mean to be so hard upon me."

"I *will* not love a man I cannot honour. There is your ring, sir;" she said, laying it with trembling fingers on the table. "I thought to have worn it till my death, and I can wear it now no more."

He took the ring mechanically, and looked at it with a sort of stupid pity for a while; then, raising his eyes to Lydia, he said:

"You saw in this the symbol of true and faithful love. If you will not take it, none shall have it," and he went to the chimney and dropped the ring into the fire.

Then without a word, without a look, with his head bowed in shame, he went from the room. He felt that all was over between them, and that remonstrance would only add to his unworthiness.

Lydia followed him with her eyes until the door closed, her lips quivering, her fingers twitching. A mad desire to go to the door and call him back seized her; but her voice failed her, and she stood as if spell-bound. The sound of a falling cinder seemed to break the charm. With a little cry of dismay she ran to the fire, and raked between the bars with desperate energy

until the ring fell through the grate into the hearth.

It burnt her fingers when she took it up, but she held it nevertheless between her folded palms in silent endurance until what with the physical pain and her breaking heart, her sufferings could be no longer hushed; then she fell upon her knees, and burying her hands and her face in the pillow of the couch, she burst into tears.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHORT AND SHARP.

Blase went along the street like one in a dream until by Whitehall he caught sight of a recruiting sergeant with a cockade of coloured ribbon in his hat.

"Here, fellow!" said he, going up to the sergeant and turning him round roughly by the arm, "do you want a recruit?"

"Yes, your honour, and I want 'em bad enough," replied the sergeant, saluting Blase, whose dress warranted the supposition that a pint of ale might come out of the joke.

"Can a man enlist in any regiment he likes?" asked Blase.

"To be sure he can. 'Tis all one to King George."

"And is there a chance of handling a Brown-Bess at once?"

"No better chance in the world, your honour."

"Is there an office near where a recruit could be registered?"

"Close handy. I could take you to it in a brace of shakes."

"Then do so," said Blase, "for I'm your man."

END OF VOL. II.

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